FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP: ASSESSING A FAMILY PLEDGE INITIATIVE'S IMPACT ON PARENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AT LEGACY POINT CHURCH

Terrance W. Hillman Jr.

B.S., Cincinnati Christian University, 2018
MDiv, United Theological Seminary, 2022

Mentors

William Curtis, DMin
Lance Watson, DMin

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ABSTRACT

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by
Terrance W. Hillman Jr.
United Theological Seminary, 2025

Mentor

William Curtis, DMin
Lance Watson, DMin

The context is Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, where a notable decline in youth attendance and engagement emerged in the aftermath of Covid-19. To address this issue, the project introduced a six-week Family Pledge Initiative designed to enhance parental accountability and promote sustained youth involvement. It is expected that increased parental commitment will positively influence children's church participation. Data collection involved attendance tracking, surveys, qualitative feedback, and observational methods. Through active participation, parents and guardians were expected to contribute meaningfully to the revitalization of congregational life and the long-term vitality of Legacy Pointe Church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first and foremost thank God for His unwavering faithfulness, grace, and guidance throughout this Doctor of Ministry journey. It was by His strength that I was sustained through every challenge, late night, and moment of uncertainty. God's presence was a constant source of peace and encouragement, reminding me of my calling and purpose even when the path was difficult. I am deeply grateful for the wisdom He provided, the doors He opened, and the endurance He granted. To God be all the glory for this accomplishment. Without Him, none of this would have been possible.

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I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Sherri L. Jackson, my editor, whose exceptional skill, patience, and attention to detail were invaluable throughout this process. Your expertise not only enhanced the clarity and coherence of my work but also gave me the confidence to present it with excellence. Thank you for

your commitment, your encouraging spirit, and your willingness to walk alongside me during this important journey. Your support went far beyond editing. Your insight and professionalism made a lasting impact, and I am deeply grateful for your contribution to the completion of this doctoral project.

DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this work to my incredible wife, Leah Hillman, whose unwavering support, patience, and encouragement have been my anchor throughout this journey. To my four beautiful children — Kylie, Terrance, Kaylee, and Lacey — thank you for being my inspiration and constant reminder of why this work matters. Your love and joy fuel my purpose. I also dedicate this to my devoted mother, Crystal Young, and my beloved grandmother, Barbara Young, whose prayers, sacrifices, and faith laid the foundation for all I am and hope to become. This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine. I thank you all.

ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PTA	Parent Teacher Associations
SARS-CoV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2

I believe that children are the future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.

—Michael Masser and Linda Creed, *The Greatest Love of All*

INTRODUCTION

As I considered how my mother and grandmother carefully created the groundwork for my religious and spiritual journey and my work at Legacy Pointe Church, I easily see a natural convergence of the impact of parental involvement and how it positively affects young people growing up in the church. When I was growing up in the church provided a loving embrace and created a setting where spiritual principles were valued above all else. My subjective experiences, along with my dedication to helping youth develop spiritually, are ripe for creating a viable youth ministry that would provide a safe and sacred space for young people to develop as followers of Christ.

Likewise, as I analyzed my current context, my observations, along with qualitative evidence indicate that the youth ministry has not rebounded from the church's shutdown due to Covid-19. It wanted to explore what happens in a youth ministry when parents are fully involved as co-laborers with youth leaders. I sought to delve into issues such as the parental engagement impact on the spiritual growth of their children and what happens when parents are not actively involved.

My life's mission was shaped in large part because of my family's unwavering dedication to my spiritual development. I can now see how my mother and grandmother spurred my spiritual journey. I see how these women sowed the seeds that grew into a deep awareness of the family's role in a person's spiritual journey. Their advice has given me a sense of purpose that has motivated me to research and promote the importance of

parental involvement in religious communities. Motivated by the powerful example my mother and grandmother set for me in guiding my own spiritual journey within the hallowed walls of the church, I hoped to explore the complex dynamics of parental engagement in supporting the spiritual growth of the next generation through my doctoral dissertation.

Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, is facing a challenge since our middle and high school students have not been showing up or participating as much since COVID-19. Our youth are forced to attend school regardless of their own desire to do so. Parents and guardians are aware of their responsibilities to ensure their children attend school and all mandated extracurricular activities practices and/or rehearsals. Nevertheless, it seems students in middle school and high school have a choice whether to attend church. Through this project, I contend that parents and guardians will demonstrate an increased commitment to ensuring their children's attendance and engagement with Legacy Pointe church if parents and guardians participated in a six-week Family Pledge Initiative.

In my opinion, students' attendance and involvement at Legacy Pointe Church will increase if the youth leaders hold parents and guardians responsible through weekly meetings and ministry opportunities. Opportunities for youth to participate in ministry provide parents and guardians an ongoing reminder that they are responsible for their children's spiritual development. Holding guardians and parents responsible for bringing their children to church is my goal. Educating the youth on the value of visiting God's house is the ultimate objective. I want the young people to replicate this pattern with their children. I personally understand the significance and importance of parents bringing

their children to church. My beliefs are based on the fact my mother and grandmother did not give me a choice to attend and participate. Not only am I a Christian, I am a preacher because of them. I want to provide young people a chance to get involved and deepen their connection with Christ through worship of the arts ministries and youth bible studies.

The idea that parents and guardians are responsible for molding the spiritual and moral development of their children is firmly grounded in both biblical teachings and historical circumstances. The need to bring children to the church for their education, maturation, and spiritual advancement is underscored by biblical passages throughout scripture. The passages, 1 Samuel 1:24 and 1 Samuel 3:19-21, emphasize the responsibility of parents and guardians to create a nurturing atmosphere for their children, where they can cultivate their faith and establish a personal connection with God. Historically, The Progressive Era had a significant influence on education, namely by highlighting the significance of parental involvement. Research during this period demonstrated that children whose parents or guardians actively participated in their secular education achieved higher academic performance, compared to those with less involved households. This historical perspective emphasizes the crucial significance of parental engagement, not just in children's academic achievement, but also in their holistic growth as conscientious and ethical humans.

From a theological perspective, stewardship refers to the responsibility we have to manage not only our financial resources, but also all the blessings, including our children. Parents and guardians have the responsibility to lead and support their children's spiritual development, impart moral principles, and foster a feeling of belonging and dedication to

the community. This stewardship entails setting a positive example, creating an atmosphere that encourages children to sustain their religious beliefs, and providing them with support as they strive to develop a profound and significant connection with God. The significance of community and trust inside the church is further emphasized by interdisciplinary perspectives, such as Social Capital Theory. This approach focuses on fostering networks, trust, and a sense of belonging among church members.

The implementation of a Family Pledge Initiative emphasized to parents and guardians the significance of their children being connected to a local church. Through the act of pledging to assist one other and actively engaging in church events, families can fortify social connections, amplify involvement, and improve the general welfare of the church community. Incorporating these foundational perspectives—biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary—into a Family Pledge Initiative offered a comprehensive approach to fostering parental accountability and youth engagement within the church, ensuring that children are nurtured in a supportive and spiritually enriching environment.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Our lives changed forever in March 2020. Immediately, everything halted. There was a global pandemic of a deadly virus known as Coronavirus, commonly called Covid-19. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID-19 is a disease caused by SARS-CoV-2. It can be very contagious and spreads quickly. Over one million people have died from COVID-19 in the United States."[1] This deadly disease shut down all non-essential entities. However, those working in healthcare, law enforcement, and grocery stores, among other essential entities, experienced an intensified work schedule.

Sports activities in all grade levels, including professional sports, were canceled. Schools provided instructional learning virtually. Shopping centers were closed. Likewise, many employers moved to remote activities. Not only did stores, shopping centers, employers, and sports facilities operate remotely, but religious institutions, including churches, operated remotely. Churches with advanced technology did not have much of an issue. Churches that were not familiar with technology had to learn quickly. Unfortunately, some churches forever closed their doors.

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[1]"About COVID-19," July 10, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/about-covid-19.html.

As the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved vaccines to lessen the impact of the virus, people began to move outside of their silos. Multiple vaccines allowed many people to receive the vaccine. These vaccines allowed people to feel comfortable about congregating with others again. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "Since December 11, 2020, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine has been available under EUA in individuals 16 years of age and older, and the authorization was expanded to include those 12 through 15 years of age on May 10, 2021."[2] Later, in 2021, more vaccines became available for all ages. The available vaccines were Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Novavax and Johnson & Johnson's Janssen. "The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines. Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is a protein subunit vaccine. The Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccine is a viral vector vaccine and can be given in some situations."[3]

The world slowly started to open again in the fall of 2021. By January 2022, more churches began to resume in-person worship services. Yet, everyone did not return after the church's doors reopened. Youth were noticeably missing. I talked to many pastors from different denominations, and they all shared the same struggles regarding a lack of youth and young adults returning to their churches. Therefore, in this paper, I seek to

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[2] "FDA Approves First COVID-19 Vaccine: Approval Signifies Key Achievement for Public Health," August 23, 2021, https://www.fda.gov/news events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine.

[3] "Overview of COVID-19 Vaccines," January 12, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/overview-COVID-19-vaccines.html.

identify the seamless connection between my ministerial journey and my personal experiences as a youth growing up in church and the context I serve. The commonality between these factors will allow me to develop and implement a project to address a specific problem at Legacy Pointe Church. Based upon research, observations, and conversations, the identified needs regarding youth in my context are not limited to my context. Thus, I will design the proposed project to allow ministerial leaders to replicate it in their contexts.

Context

Since the pandemic, many ministerial colleagues identified a lack of youth attending their local churches as a problem. Church leaders have always explored ways and strategies to engage young people. My friends who serve as youth pastors in various churches talked about having great ministry models that attracted many youth and young adults. The youth pastors explained that parental involvement was critical to their ministries' success. One youth pastor said his ministry hosted a monthly youth outing of the young people's choice. They would go bowling, skating, playing arcade games, and even going to amusement parks at no cost to the participants. However, to participate, the youth had to be active in ministry and attend at least three of the four Sundays a month. Being active in ministry meant the youth had to actively participate in one of the following: the youth usher board, youth praise team, dance ministry, or any other church-related ministry. The youth pastor intimated that he has never had an issue with the parents not bringing youth to church.

Another ministry colleague's youth ministry blossomed by having multiple youth groups based on age because they could learn and talk about subjects on their own level. The curriculum was specific for their age groups. Conversations centered on subjects the youth chose to discuss. My friend reported that the young people were involved in the groups and often invited their friends to attend. He stated that he saw numerical growth and the youths' spiritual growth in their relationships with Christ. I believe spiritual growth is an excellent indicator of a successful youth ministry. Numerical growth is good and needed, but nothing compares to spiritual growth.

Nevertheless, not all youth ministries were successful. Other friends reported struggling to develop a thriving youth ministry. One friend spoke of being at a church as a youth pastor with an average of 150 to 200 people in weekly attendance. The church was financially secure but had insufficient funds for the youth ministry. The youth pastor had limited financial resources to get the youth back in the church building and actively involved. He was hitting a brick wall. Youth did not appear to be the focus as volunteers did not fully commit, and parents and guardians did not regularly bring their children. Still, another youth director faced unconventional troubles with his youth ministry. This youth ministry averaged 250 and 300 participants in Sunday morning youth church. With supportive volunteers willing to serve where needed and looking in, this youth ministry appeared to be thriving. However, the youth director expressed why he believed the youth ministry failed. Although they had many young people, he did not feel these young people were growing spiritually. Based upon his periodic conversations with the youth, he concluded they were not growing spiritually. Therefore, he did not think that his youth program was a success. Thus, he began engaging in a different strategy to ensure the

children grew spiritually. He intentionally chose activities and curriculum to present to the young people. This strategy encouraged me and strongly resonated with me. Things may look one way on the outside but different on the inside. Growth is not always what you can see, but the growth that you cannot measure with the naked eye is what matters most. These are the testimonies of my friends who lead youth ministries before COVID-19.

Before COVID-19, parental participation in youth ministry was essential in creating a welcoming and community-focused atmosphere. In my opinion, parents engaged in various activities, such as volunteering, attending events, and conversing with their children about their spiritual and personal growth. Parent involvement, I believed, produced stronger ties between the youth, their families, and the larger church community. According to the pastor of my targeted context, Legacy Pointe Church, before the COVID-19 pandemic, parents actively participated in outreach, mentorship, and fundraising events. This cooperative effort gave the younger members a sense of continuity and stability and supported the logistical needs of the youth activities. Shared values and ideas were maintained. Parents, youth leaders, and young people forged strong bonds. This atmosphere supported spiritual and personal growth.

Parents frequently planned and organized youth events, which fostered a sense of shared responsibility. Thanks to these partnerships, the community's expectations were met, and young people's needs were better communicated. Parental participation also extended to educational components as parents guided their children's spiritual development at home and participated in conversations regarding religious teachings. Parents' active involvement helped create a comprehensive and integrated approach to

youth ministry. Establishing transparent lines of communication among young people, youth leaders, and the larger church community was greatly aided by parents. The concerns and ambitions of parents and young people were recognized and considered in frequent meetings, feedback sessions, and cooperative decision-making procedures. Throughout the youth ministry, this participatory method fostered a community where everyone felt heard and respected while it fostered inclusivity and empowerment.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic sparked a substantial transformation in the dynamics of youth ministry and parental engagement. The cancellation or transition of in-person gatherings and activities to online formats posed unprecedented challenges to the established feeling of community. Parents who had formerly been actively involved in organizing activities, attending events, and mentoring students, suddenly faced the challenge of adapting to new, frequently virtual, methods of engagement. Numerous parents were managing the obligations of employment, childcare, and virtual education, which hindered their ability to sustain the same degree of involvement in church events. The transition to a predominantly virtual environment resulted in a restriction of the spontaneous, informal connections that previously fostered community cohesion.

Despite these challenges, numerous parents persisted in their efforts to foster their children's spiritual development and maintain ties with the church community. They adjusted by establishing faith-oriented activities at home, participating in online youth group sessions, and discovering innovative methods to engage in substantive discussions about faith with their children. This period underscored the significance of a robust spiritual foundation at home, necessitating that parents have a more active part in their children's religious education. This heightened engagement at home underscored the

notion that spiritual development transcends the church edifice; it constitutes an ongoing journey inside the familial structure. However, the absence of face-to-face interaction posed difficulties in sustaining the same level of accountability and support that had previously been cultivated through community engagement.

With the relaxation of restrictions and the resumption of in-person church events, there is an intensified emphasis on re-engaging parents in youth ministry. The pandemic has highlighted the essential role of parents in the spiritual and personal growth of their children. The necessity to restore a collaboration between parents and the church has become increasingly apparent. The Family Pledge Initiative at Legacy Pointe Church aims to meet this need by offering a systematic framework for parental engagement, promoting accountability, and enabling families to actively contribute to their children's spiritual development. By reaffirming these principles in the post-pandemic era, the church seeks to restore the sense of community, continuity, and collective responsibility that characterized youth ministry. This effort aims to establish an environment in which families feel empowered and motivated to participate in their children's spiritual development, both in the church and at home.

For most, youth ministry after COVID-19 has been difficult. Many churches halted in-person services for at least two years or longer. It was difficult to persuade anyone to return to church after being out of the church building for so long. People had grown accustomed to viewing church services online while lounging in the comfort of their homes. In addition, people were reluctant to socialize for fear of contracting the virus. Many people looked to the church for answers on important issues, including racial inequity, police brutality, injustice, and the economic divide between Blacks and white

people. In an article, "5 Critical Changes in Post-Pandemic Youth Ministry," Brad Griffin indicated what I believe many youth ministry leaders feel post-pandemic. He wrote the following:

> "What do we do now? Students who used to be involved aren't showing up anymore. New visitors at youth group aren't sure what to do — or if they belong here. Volunteers are in short supply, and the ones we have are exhausted and burned out. We've been looking for a youth director for months, and just aren't getting leads. Our church feels like a battleground for political culture wars — or like a reflection pool no one dares disrupt."[4]

My mentor often told me one way to determine whether a church is healthy is to observe the youth program. Our future depends on young people. Seeing young people in worship adds a vibrant and joyous element, and their presence enables the ministry to remain current. Numerous scriptural references demonstrate the significance of youth. For example, Jesus encourages the disciples to allow the children to be in his presence. Jesus commands them to "let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."[5] It is common for young people to feel as though they are not being heard or understood. Some adults think a young person's age makes their opinions less valuable. Jesus asserted further that those like the children are entitled to the Kingdom of Heaven. Another scripture affirming the importance of children states, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation."[6] Paul illustrated the intensity one should have

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[4] Brad M. Griffin, "5 Critical changes in post-pandemic youth ministry," August 10, 2022, https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/5-critical-changes-in-post-pandemic-youth-ministry.

[5] Matthew 19:14, NRSV, unless noted otherwise, all bible citations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

[6] 1 Peter 2:2.

when engaging God's words. As a father of four children, I know when my little one is ready to eat or drink milk. These and other verses highlight the significance of young people coming to Jesus and how everyone should adopt the attitude of a young person hungry for more from God.

This project aims to inform parents and guardians of the importance of raising their children in the church, specifically Legacy Pointe Church. Following the height of the pandemic, we returned to the sanctuary. Since then, the youth ministry at Legacy Pointe Church has been rebuilding. Increasing parental involvement is a critical first step in reviving and strengthening youth ministry. A more effective youth program starts with open communication channels and cooperation with parents. Initiatives like frequent parent meetings, family-friendly activities, and ongoing communication foster a sense of community and support. The youth ministry can better understand the needs and expectations of the community by actively incorporating parents. This collaborative approach improves the relationship between the church and families. It offers a strong foundation for a vibrant youth ministry that attends to young people's overall development in the context of family and faith.

Legacy Pointe Church is at 6280 Kugler Mill Road in Kenwood, a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio.[7] My family and I have been faithful members of this congregation since Sunday, March 5, 2023. Although my time as a member has been short, I have learned much about Legacy Pointe's history and current ministries. The lead pastor is Dr. Paul Booth Jr., who strongly believes in serving the community. He has served on the

[7] Property record, 6280 Kugler Mill Rd, Cincinnati, OH 45236, www.loopnet.com. https://www.loopnet.com/property/6280-kugler-mill-rd-cincinnati-oh-45236/39061-6000092008700/

International Commission on Evangelism in the Baptist World Alliance, which allowed him to spread the message of Jesus Christ and aid impoverished communities in Santiago, Chile. He is a 2012 graduate of C-Change, "an innovative institute sponsored by the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce that develops top young professionals who will be change agents in Cincinnati and throughout the region."[8] Through his work as the youth and college pastor at Zion Hill Baptist Church in Atlanta, he developed impactful and engaging programs for youth of all ages. He "accomplished this through developmental programs in academic advancement and service initiatives. He developed a program for praise and worship training that incorporate the knowledge, skills and talents of senior members of the congregation, forming a truly intergenerational ministry."[9]

According to the church's website, the church began in 2014 with the launch team's response to a "call and a mandate to reach the northern corridor of Cincinnati and beyond."[10] Following discussions throughout Cincinnati, the launch team held the first event, a city-wide Good Friday service, "7 Words of Freedom," at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.

The church's historical records indicate that the number of members quickly rose, prompting leadership to contemplate a location change. "After being portable for 15 months, we started holding services in a temporary home. We held services at Pleasant Ridge Presbyterian Church. The first service took place on November 8, 2015, at 1:00

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[8] "Our Pastor: Paul M. Booth, Jr. PhD," https://www.legacypointechurch.org/our-pastor/.

[9] "Our Pastor," https://legacypointechurch.org/our-pastor/.

[10] The Legacy Story." Legacy Pointe Church, https://www.legacypointechurch.org/about/the-legacy-story.

pm. As the church continued to grow, the team prayed that the Lord would bless the church with a permanent home."[11]

The first worship in the new location was Mother's Day 2016, with the official grand opening on September 18, 2016. "Immediately preparations were made to raise funds to purchase our new home. A Legacy Pointe Builders Campaign was established and the blessings started pouring in."[12] Companies, churches, and community members financially supported this financial campaign.

History records the members purchased the church's first permanent location, 6280 Kugler Mill, in June 2017, with the official dedication and installation of the pastor in September 2018. However, as with many worship spaces, in March 2020, COVID-19 ravished churches of its sense of normalcy, resulting in an immediate pivot to virtual worship. Everything changed, including the order of service. Pastor Booth preached from the floor instead of the pulpit. Worship service streamed on YouTube, Facebook, and the church's website. An online minister engaged the people watching virtually. Facebook allowed us to schedule replays of the service for multiple Sunday showings. All church activities, including Faith in the City, Paint Night, and virtual cooking, were streamed online. The virtual activities created a community outside of gatherings inside the church. Every Friday, we hosted a virtual block party that included a DJ who took song requests. We also had virtual quarterly life groups where participants read and discussed a book aligned with the church's yearly theme.

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[11] "Legacy Story," https://www.legacypointechurch.org/about/the-legacy-story/.

[12] "Legacy Story," https://www.legacypointechurch.org/about/the-legacy-story/.

Legacy Pointe Church, in my opinion, is a church that loves people with the power and commitment of Jesus Christ. A church that lives with passion, purposefully and in pursuit of God's promise for our lives. "Legacy Pointe Church is a Christian community of faith where people are empowered with the Word of God. A place where people are challenged to live their legacy now and developed to lead families and communities with the faith and fervor of God." [13] The Pointe strives to empower its faith community by:

- Establishing a multi-faceted ministry that meets people where they are to help them grow spiritually and practically.
- Investing in the future of our local, national and global communities through service.
- Developing a relevant and engaging youth ministry, that raises up a bold new generation of believers.[14]

The youth ministry at Legacy Pointe Church is known as the Higher Dimension or HD Life Student Ministry. It seeks to provide programming for infants to adults. The groups and their ages are "Wiggling Worshippers," infant-2 years; "Little Legs," 3-4 years; "Legacy Kids," Kindergarten-3rd grade; "The Bridge," 4th-6th grade; "Next Generation, 7th-12th grade, "College Kids," and "Young Professionals," 18-25 years. The ministry organized a spectrum of events, encompassing lock-ins, movie nights,

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[13] "Mission & Vision," Legacy Pointe Church, https://www.legacypointechurch.org/mission.

[14] "Mission & Vision," https://www.legacypointechurch.org/mission.

escape rooms, and skating parties, while active participation in the main worship during key observances such as Black History, Easter, Harvest Festival, and Christmas.

Notably, Legacy Pointe Church is near Silverton Paideia and Madeira schools. The church's commitment to these educational institutions manifested in adopting both schools. Engagements with the community involve Thanksgiving basket preparations during the holiday season, active participation in after-school programs with games organized by the outreach team, and campus cleanup initiatives. Moreover, during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the church demonstrated solidarity with educational faculty by distributing gift cards accompanied by words of encouragement. However, it is noteworthy that the translation of youth's online social interactions during the pandemic did not seamlessly align with the objectives of virtual ministry, thus necessitating a recalibration of approaches to address the evolving dynamics effectively.

Ministerial Journal

My real calling and passion are serving the church. As a child, I was always aware that God had a hand in my life. Throughout my childhood, I attended several different schools, where students' assessments of me were mostly the same. They said something akin to "There's something different about you." Even though I understood what they meant, I asked, "What do you mean by that?" When they asked if I attended church, I would respond in the affirmative. If they did not ask, I would not divulge the information. I knew I was different; therefore, I was never ashamed or embarrassed of the label. I was aware of the impact that God's hand was having on my life. I tried at times to

hang with the popular crowd. Yet, I knew that was not who I was, prompting me to leave politely. I decided to accept God's calling on my life entirely.

During my early years, I frequently contemplated the reasons for my sense of alienation among my peers, particularly when attempting to assimilate into the popular group. I often questioned why I could not simply conform to the prevailing norm like others. An internal voice consistently guided me toward another path. I have come to heed that voice, recognizing it as God's method of safeguarding me and maintaining my focus on His intentions for my life. As my peers engaged in pursuits that contradicted my principles, I experienced an irresistible compulsion to pursue something more significant. I recognized that God was distinguishing me, not to seclude me, but to equip me for a more significant mission.

This perception of my difference transformed into a symbol of pride, rather than a cause for uneasiness. It inspired me to explore my faith more profoundly, pursuing comprehension and insight into God's calling for me. I commenced cultivating a profound relationship with Him, one that directed my choices and behaviors. I devoted numerous hours to prayer, seeking divine wisdom and fortitude to uphold my beliefs. I derived solace from the scriptures, where narratives of individuals who adhered to duty while being distinct profoundly resonated with me. These biblical instances affirmed that my journey, if occasionally alone, was integral to a heavenly scheme far beyond my understanding.

As my faith deepened, my perception of the world transformed. My experiences at multiple educational institutions and religious organizations exposed me to a variety of ideologies and lifestyles. In every context, I observed a same core truth: there existed a

profound yearning for something greater, something attainable just through God. This insight sparked a fire in me to assist others, particularly those who felt disconnected or estranged from their purpose. I started to perceive my difference not as an impediment, but as a chance to illuminate individuals in my vicinity. It felt as though God was saying, "I have distinguished you for this purpose — to guide others towards Me."

During these crucial years, I consciously decided to fully embrace my calling. I ceased attempting to conform to unsuitable molds and began pursuing methods to match my life with God's purpose. I participated in church activities, including youth groups and community outreach projects. I developed a growing interest in the influence of spirituality on individuals, particularly within familial contexts. I observed that a robust spiritual basis within the home can significantly impact the lives of young individuals, as it did in my own experience. This burgeoning enthusiasm for family and church established the foundation for my future pursuits, including my dedication to projects such as the Family Pledge at Legacy Pointe Church. It was evident that God was preparing me for a career of service, use my experiences to equip me for the forthcoming path.

During my time at Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, the church of my youth, I felt called to God's work. My mother and grandma belonged to this church. My mother and grandmother's tremendous influence has significantly impacted the trajectory of my spiritual development. Starting in my early years, they guided me to the road of religion by regularly attending church and engaging in its activities. Their steadfast dedication to fostering my spiritual base created the framework for a deep relationship with God. I developed a profound respect for the Lord's teachings because of these women's support,

their example of putting worship first, and our time of praying together. Their contribution went beyond simply attending church. They brought spiritual experiences alive with compelling stories, cherished family customs, and a sincere love for the Lord. To put it another way, my mother and grandmother had a crucial role in helping to build my spiritual framework rather than merely serving as my guide to church.

Rev. Dr. Allen E. Middleton Sr. has been the senior pastor of Galilee for more than 40 years. He introduced me to United Theological Seminary, where he is also a graduate. Pastor Middleton has served as the pastor of Galilee. When I was five years old, I remember seeing Pastor Middleton preach every Sunday as I yearned for baptism. One Sunday after church, I went to him and told him I wanted to get baptized. He started asking me several questions. He inquired about my knowledge of Jesus' identity and acceptance of Him as my Lord and Savior. I provided all the requested information. The following Sunday, I was baptized. I recall experiencing God's presence wash over me when I was a small child. I initially grew in my connection with the Lord while at Galilee. I discovered my calling to the vocation of preaching in this church. I gained experience leading others at this church. This church served as a solid foundation while I spiritually and intellectually developed in the ministry.

I started to sense God calling me to preach when I was twelve years old. However, I completely disregarded the indicators and this nagging urge to preach. I didn't think I was ready to speak in front of a large audience since I was too young. It wasn't until I was twenty-one years old that I answered God's call. Timothy's second epistle encourages us to "proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in

teaching."[15] In March 2014, while in my devotional time, I once more sensed that God was calling me to preach. Still, I needed more than just a passage to settle into my heart because I was still apprehensive. I told Pastor Middleton that I had felt called to preach since I was twelve, but I wasn't sure if I was ready. I knew that answering the call to preach meant taking on much responsibility and sacrificing things I valued. I also had to cut back on other activities like sporting events, hanging out with friends, and other activities involving young people. In my opinion, preaching was a summons to study. I was aware that to dedicate myself to the calling of the preaching ministry fully, I would need to make some sacrifices.

I delivered my first sermon at Galilee Missionary Baptist Church on Sunday, March 23, 2014. In the church of my upbringing, I preached "Whose Image is on You?" I used Matthew 22:15-22 as the supporting biblical text. It is the story of the Pharisees who questioned whether paying taxes to Caesar was a legal means to corner Jesus. Instead, Jesus asked whose picture was on the coin. They responded, "The emperor's,"[16] prompting Jesus to declare, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that of God."[17]

In liturgical dance, I am proficient. I've always enjoyed dancing since I was a child. My sister and I were constantly involved in various ministries at church, thanks to our mother. Each June, my home church hosted a Youth Explosion weekend. Youth departments from local churches were present to dance, sing, step, or other youth

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[15] 2 Timothy 4:2.

[16] Matthew 22:21.

[17] Matthew 22:21.

activities. I recall witnessing a mime ministry that would profoundly alter my life course. I had never seen a man act in such a way in a church setting. However, I had seen young women or women performing liturgical praise dances in church. In awe of the situation, I was also thrilled. Right away, it became clear that I wanted to pursue mime dancing. My request to our youth director to launch a mime ministry at the church did not manifest until a year later. Several months later, our mime ministry began as anticipated under the proposal. We had fifteen men and women participants when we performed the first time. Later, I would launch my mime troupe.

I and another male, both Galilee Missionary Baptist Church members, made up the mime dance troupe. I told him about my intentions to form a mime club not affiliated with the church, and he promised to join me. We made our debut during the church's Youth Explosion. Other local dance groups also performed on the Friday night of the event. That evening, we led worship, marking the beginning of Just for Jesus, also known as J4J. We performed at many local and national events for the next few years. We also traveled to other cities and states to conduct workshops and perform at weddings and funerals. We had a dance schedule, which prevented me from playing sports, which I liked. We performed at least forty times a year, evangelizing through dance. I grew closer to the Lord through this ministry. I experienced the Holy Spirit's power moving through mime. I became anxious every time I danced to minister. However, immediately when I started, the Holy Spirit's power would calm my anxiety, and I would sense God's presence all around me. When I mimed, the song's lyrics came to life because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in me in this way. God used this ministry to bring many young people into the church and serve their spiritual needs.

Synergy

As I consider how my mother and grandmother carefully created the groundwork for my religious and spiritual journey and my work at Legacy Pointe Church, I quickly see a natural convergence of the impact of parental involvement and how it positively affects young people growing up in the church. When I was growing up in the loving embrace of the church, spiritual principles were valued, creating a setting above all else. Along with my dedication to helping youth develop spiritually, subjective experiences are ripe for creating a viable youth ministry that would provide a safe and sacred space for young people to grow as followers of Christ.

Likewise, as I analyze my current context, my observations and evidence indicate that the youth ministry has not rebounded since the church resumed its normal activities following the shutdown due to the pandemic. I desire to analyze what happens in a youth ministry when parents are fully involved and serve as co-laborers with youth leaders. I seek to delve into issues such as parental engagement's impact on their children's spiritual growth and what happens when parents are not actively involved.

Conclusion

My family's unwavering dedication to spiritual development largely shaped my life's mission. I now can see how my mother and grandmother spurred my spiritual journey. I know how these women sowed the seeds that grew into a deep awareness of the family's role in a person's spiritual journey. Their advice has given me a sense of purpose that has motivated me to research and promote the importance of parental

involvement in religious communities. Motivated by the powerful example my mother and grandmother set for me in guiding my spiritual journey within the hallowed walls of the church, I hope to explore the complex dynamics of parental engagement in supporting the spiritual growth of the next generation through my doctoral dissertation.

Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, is facing a challenge since our middle and high school students have not been showing up or participating as much since COVID-19. Our youth must attend school regardless of their desire to do so. Parents and guardians know their responsibilities to ensure their children attend school and all mandated extracurricular activities, practices, and rehearsals. It seems that middle and high school students have a choice about whether to attend church. Through this project, I contend that the attendance and involvement of middle school and high school students at Legacy Pointe Church will likely increase if parents and guardians actively volunteer and bring their children to church.

I believe students' attendance and involvement at Legacy Pointe Church will increase if the youth leaders hold parents and guardians responsible through weekly meetings and ministry opportunities. There will be opportunities for youth to participate in ministry. It is an ongoing reminder that parents and guardians must take their children to church. My goal is to hold guardians and parents responsible for bringing their children to church. The ultimate objective is to educate the youth on the value of visiting God's house. I want the young people to continue this pattern of bringing their children to church when they grow up. I understand the significance and importance of parents bringing their children to church. I fully believe it is because my mother and grandmother did not give me a choice of whether I attended and participated in church that I am not

only a follower of Christ, but I am a preacher of the Lord's gospel. I want to provide young people a chance to get involved and deepen their connection with Christ through worship of the arts ministries and youth bible studies.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Raising children in the church offers a solid moral and ethical foundation, instilling values that can guide them throughout life. The church provides community and support, fostering social connections and a network of positive role models. It also offers opportunities for spiritual growth, teaching important lessons about empathy, compassion, and service to others. Additionally, involvement in the church helps children develop a sense of purpose and a framework for understanding the world, which can be invaluable as they navigate the complexities of life. Furthermore, being raised in the church often encourages a sense of belonging and a moral compass that can help children make informed, ethical decisions as they grow into responsible adults.

The biblical texts, 1 Samuel 1:24 and 1 Samuel 3:19-21 speak to my project, which focuses on instilling in parents the importance of bringing their children to the church for training, development, and spiritual growth. These verses highlight themes of faith, prayer, and God's faithfulness in response to Hannah's earnest prayers. Samuel's birth and dedication are significant events that lay the foundation for his prophetic role in the subsequent chapters of 1 Samuel.

The focus text, 1 Samuel 3:19-21, describes how God chose Samuel as a prophet and how Samuel's prophetic words were always fulfilled. Additionally, the text mentions that all of Israel recognized Samuel as a true prophet of the Lord. The text also highlights

how God continued to communicate with Samuel at Shiloh. As a child, Samuel developed a close and special relationship with God. As God guided and supported Samuel, Samuel's words and prophecies were on target. As a prophet, Samuel's reputation spread throughout Israel's entire land, from the northern city of Dan to the southern city of Beersheba. The people of Israel recognized Samuel's authenticity as God's messenger. Shiloh was a significant religious center in ancient Israel, where the Tabernacle, a sacred tent, was located. God continued communicating with Samuel at Shiloh, revealing His will and guidance through divine messages or "His word." These verses depict Samuel as a chosen and recognized prophet whose words were always fulfilled because of his close relationship with God. It also underscores the significance of Shiloh as a place of divine revelation. This passage is part of a larger narrative in the book of 1 Samuel, which tells the story of Samuel's call to prophecy and his role in the history of Israel.

Exegesis of Scriptures
1 Samuel 1:24, 3:19-21

> When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young.
>
> As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

Historical Context

While investigating the book of 1 Samuel, Jewish tradition, particularly in the sixth century AD, believes that the writer of 1 and II Samuel was Samuel, a prophet. There is a consensus among some scholars and theologians that many authors contributed to the development of I and II Samuel. In a biblical commentary entitled, *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*, the authors write, "the death of Samuel is recorded toward the end of the book that we know as 1 Samuel (25:1 and 28:3). Therefore, it is unlikely that he was the writer of these books."[1] For that reason, some scholars believe that the name is not entirely appropriate since Samuel dies before 1 Samuel ends. Others believe that the prophets Nathan and Gad were authors who contributed to these two books.

Scholar P. Kyle McCarter Jr. states, "Originally the Books of Samuel were one book. The division into two derives from the Greek and Latin traditions of the text, not the Hebrew."[2] The books of Samuel and Kings were a single historical document divided into four sections called 'Books of the Kingdom' or 'Reigns.'[3] The authors of the *New Bible Commentary* inform us that it was "the sixteenth century Hebrew Bibles to have divided the original book of Samuel into two parts, named the first and second books of Samuel."[4] This separation into two distinct books, as current translations indicate do not

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[1] R. L. Omanson and J. Ellington, *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 2001), 3.

[2] P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, 8 vol. Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), 1.

[3] "Books of Samuel," Blue Letter Bible: Bible Search and Study Tools," bible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=ET0003210,IT0007626,BT0003667.

[4] D. F. Payne, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, eds. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham Leicester (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 296.

alter their historical or thematic continuity, as the narrative still follows the same historical events and characters.

The book of 1 Samuel is an Old Testament book that provides essential insights into the history of ancient Israel. It covers a period of significant transition in the history of the Israelites, including the shift from a loose confederation of tribes to the establishment of a monarchy. Before the events described in 1 Samuel, Israel was in a period known as the Period of Judges. During this time, various leaders and judges, who God raised to deliver them from their enemies, ruled the Israelites. "It was a period of victory, success, decline and fall. Above all, the author wanted to demonstrate God's hand and God's purposes in all these historical events."[5] This book covers a crucial period in the history of Israel, roughly from 1150 BC to 1010 BC. It follows the events of the book Judges, marked by a lack of centralized leadership and moral decay.

First Samuel is part of the Deuteronomistic history, which includes Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings. "The Deuteronomistic History, encompassing the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings, prefaced by Deuteronomy, relates Israel's history in the Promised Land, from the conquest under Joshua until the end of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah."[6] These books share a common theological perspective and historical context. The central theme of 1 Samuel is the transition from a theocratic system led by judges and priests to a monarchy, with the anointing of Saul as the first king of Israel and later David. One key figure in 1 Samuel is

[5] Payne, "1 and 2 Samuel, 297.

[6] Michael David Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford and Annotated Apocrypha* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 405.

Samuel. He was a prophet, priest, and judge who played a pivotal role in the book's early chapters. His birth, calling, and leadership are central to the narrative. Another prominent figure, Saul, is the first king. He is an important character who represents the people's desire for a king. There is also David, whom God chose, and Samuel anointed to become Israel's future king. Consider what Ralph Klein writes:

> "The book of 1 Samuel explores themes of obedience to God's command, the consequences of disobedience, and the importance of faith and prayer. It addresses the tension between human leadership (the monarchy) and God's ultimate rule. Though the reputation of Samuel lent prestige to David, the choice itself was not Samuel's. David was the youngest, perhaps the shortest, and was tending sheep while his brothers were doing important things with the prophet Samuel. David was the divinely designated successor to Saul. The rest of 1 Samuel relates how this became true, as David contested with Saul in warfare and for the favor of the people. All David's deeds of politics, guerrilla action and intrigue, marriages of convenience, and questionable service with the Philistines are trumped by a fact: already at the start Yahweh had anointed him to be Saul's successor."[7]

First Samuel is rich in theological significance, addressing issues of divine providence, human leadership, and the consequences of human choices in the context of God's plan.

Literary Context

First Samuel provides rich descriptions of characters, settings, and events. It often delves into the thoughts and emotions of the characters, making the stories come to life. 1 Samuel includes extensive dialogue between characters, allowing readers to gain insight into the characters' personalities and motivations. One passage that shows this is 1 Samuel 1:10-17, which states:

> She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant,

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[7] Ralph Klein, "Commentary on 1 Samuel 15:34 —16:13," June 14, 2009, https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-1-samuel-1534-35-161-13-2.

> and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head." As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. So, Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.

The narrative style allows for the development of key characters, such as Samuel, Saul, and David, as they undergo personal and spiritual transformations throughout the book. Samuel's birth and his mother Hannah's prayer are in 1 Samuel 1:1–28. An outline of these significant characters is as follows:

- 1 Samuel 3:1–21 presents the divine summons to Samuel and his initial prophetic mission.
- 1 Samuel 9:1-27 presents Saul as Israel's first king.
- 1 Samuel 15:1-35 indicates a turning point in Saul's reign and his disobedience to God's instruction.
- 1 Samuel 16:1–13 presents David's coronation as Israel's future ruler.
- 1 Samuel 17:1–58 tells the well-known narrative of David's victory against Goliath, demonstrating his bravery and faith.

The events are presented in chronological order, making it easy to follow the historical progression of the narrative. However, some scholars have pushed back on the notion that the book of 1 Samuel is in chronological order and is in the right place in the Bible. Ralph W. Klein notes in the *Word Biblical Commentary* that "While 1 Samuel opens with the marvelous birth of Samuel, who is to play an important role in the book up

to chap. 25 (or even to chap. 28 if one includes the incident with the Witch at Endor), some argue that the Samuel of chaps. 1-7 really carries on the tradition of the judges, and that the book divisions might better be placed between the end of the era of the judges and the rise of the monarchy in chaps. 8ff."[8]

The book contains prophetic elements where Samuel, a prophet, delivers messages from God to various characters, adding a distinctive dimension to the narrative. Samuel's role as a prophet is pivotal in conveying God's will and guidance to the characters and the nation of Israel. Here are a few examples where Samuel serves as a messenger of God in the book of 1 Samuel:

1.) Samuel's call to Eli in 1 Samuel 3:11–14. At this point, Samuel answers God's call and informs Eli of the impending judgment on his household.

2.) Samuel anoints Saul as king in 1 Samuel 9:15–16. Samuel informs Saul that God selected him to lead Israel as king.

3.) Samuel rebukes Saul in 1 Samuel 13:13–14. Samuel approaches Saul and informs him of God's disapproval of his behavior.

4.) Samuel anoints David in 1 Samuel 16:13. Samuel, acting under God's direction, anoints David as the future king of Israel.

The narrative may employ symbolism to convey deeper meanings or theological messages, such as the anointing of kings representing divine choice and authority. While recounting historical events, the narrative style also imparts moral and ethical lessons through the consequences of the characters' actions. The literary style of 1 Samuel is

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[8] Ralph W Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel,* Vol. 10 (New York, NY: Harpercollins Publishers, 2018), xxv.

characterized by its detailed storytelling, rich character development, and a focus on conveying historical and theological themes through a narrative format. This style makes the book engaging and informative for readers seeking to understand the history and theology of the Old Testament.

Detailed Analysis

1 Samuel 1:1-24 – Samuel's Birth and Dedication

To fully grasp 1 Samuel 1:24, it is crucial to explore the entire block that includes verses 1-23. First, verses 1-8 tell the story of Elkanah, his two wives, and their yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh. Verses 1 and 2 give a detailed picture of Elkanah.
Scholars believe that the language of verse 1 is like Judges 13:2, which states, "There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren having borne no children."[9] Scholar P. Kyle McCarter Jr. writes, "In light of the last detail, we should probably conclude that the text of Masoretic Text at this point is not simply the result of the substitution of a more common reading for a less common one, but of the influence of Judges 13:2, especially given the influence of the text of Samson's birth narrative on our story elsewhere. This, then, is a textual hint of the original independence of the prophetic history of the rise of kingship that begins here with the story of Samuel."[10]

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[9] Judges 13:2.

[10] McCarter, *I Samuel*, 51.

Elkanah was an Ephraimite, which means he belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some scholars differ in understanding the genealogy of Elkanah's family line. "Therefore, it is unclear whether Elkanah was a Benjaminite, an Ephraimite, an Ephrathite, or a Levite."[11] The text states that there was a certain man from Ramathaim (v.1a). The uncertainty lies in the location of Ramathaim, or Ramah, that may be in Benjamin or Ephraim. "Further, it is not clear whether Elkanah is from *the tribe* of Ephraim, and therefore an Ephr/aim/ite (Greek LXX of the last word of 1 Sam 1:1), or, as the Hebrew reads, that he is from *the region* of 'Mount Ephraim' and is additionally identified as an Ephr/ath/ite (Hebrew MT). An Ephrathite would be from or associated with the region around Bethlehem (Gen 35:19; Ruth 1:2; 1 Sam 17:12; Mic 5:2)."[12] Tsumura suggests that "Elkanah might have been of Bethlehemite stock [thus an 'Ephrathite'] rather than being an 'Ephraimite,' even though he dwelt *in the hill country of Ephraim*"[13] There were others who believed Elkanah was a Levite, who was associated with a tribal group but lived in a different tribal territory.

Elkanah had two wives, Hannah, who was barren, and Peninnah, who had children. Tony Cartledge writes, "The woman's name was Hannah, and 'Hannah' means 'grace,' but the woman's difficult life betrayed her pleasant name. We are told that Hannah was the most miserable of women; her rival wife had several children, but Hannah had none."[14] Hannah is depicted as a woman who faces anguish due to her

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[11] Meredith Faubel Nyberg, "Elkanah, Father of Samuel," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software.

[12] Nyberg, "Elkanah, Father of Samuel."

[13]David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapides, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 94.

[14]Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2001), 27.

inability to bear children. Hannah's story begins with her barrenness, a source of deep anguish in ancient Israelite society, where motherhood was highly valued.

The text portrays her in distress, mainly because her husband's other wife, Peninnah, bore children while she remained barren, which led to significant tension and rivalry in their household. It was Hannah's bareness that formed this story. Eugene Peterson writes, "Our attention immediately shifts from the fertility of place and family to Hannah's bereftness. The barren wife is an established biblical motif: Hannah's childlessness is framed by Sarah in Genesis (Gen. 16:1 and 18:9-15) and Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:7)."[15] Elkanah loved Hannah despite her inability to have children and was sensitive to her pain. He would offer sacrifices to the Lord and provide portions to his wives and their children. Elkanah and his family would make an annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, the location of the Tabernacle of the Lord. During the pilgrimage, sacrifices were made, and Elkanah would distribute portions to his wives and their children.

(vv.9-18):

In this pericope, the narrative delves deeper into Hannah's emotional turmoil and her interaction with Eli, the high priest at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Eli noticed Hannah's distress as she is praying. He initially mistakes her fervent prayer for drunkenness due to her silent movements and the intensity of her supplication. Upon Hannah's explanation of her situation, Eli blesses her, recognizing her sincerity and pain. "Hannah mingled tears

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[15] Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press, 1996), 16.

with her prayers; she considered the mercy of our God, who knows the troubled soul. God gives us leave, in prayer, not only to ask good things in general, but to mention that special good thing we most need and desire. She spoke softly, none could hear her. Hereby she testified her belief of God's knowledge of the heart and its desires. Eli was high priest, and judge in Israel."[16] When Eli misdiagnoses her cry, Hannah does not retaliate against him, but rather, respectfully explains her anguish, leading Eli to understand her distress and offer a blessing for God to grant her request. Henry also wrote, "Eli was willing to acknowledge his mistake. Hannah went away with satisfaction of mind. She had herself by prayer committed her case to God, and Eli had prayed for her."[17]

Hannah made a vow to the Lord during their visit to Shiloh. Hannah's sorrow and yearning for a child are evident as she prays earnestly to the Lord, pouring her heart into the temple. She makes a vow to dedicate her child to the service of the Lord if her prayer is answered. "On the family's annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah makes a bargain: if the Lord gives her a son, she will give him back, dedicating him to God."[18] She vowed that if the Lord granted her a son, she would dedicate him to God's service. Elkanah supported her in this vow. After understanding her sincere prayers, Eli blesses Hannah, expressing confidence that God would grant her request for a child. Following Eli's

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[16] "1 Samuel 1:16 Meaning," https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1-Samuel-1-16_meaning/.

[17] *The Miniature Commentary: Being Short Comments on Every Chapter of the Holy Bible* (United Kingdom: Religious Tract Society, 1840), 299.

[18] Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapides, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 26.

blessing, Hannah's countenance changes, and she finds solace, demonstrating a newfound sense of hope and peace after interacting with the high priest.

(vv.19-20):

In these verses, the text shifts to the fulfillment of Hannah's fervent prayer and the birth of her son, Samuel. After Hannah's interaction with Eli at the Tabernacle in Shiloh, she returns home with her husband, Elkanah. The text states, "Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her."[19] This phrasing suggests that in response to Hannah's prayers, God enabled her to conceive a child. K. A. Mathews writes, "Because the Lord answered her prayer, she dedicated Samuel to serve at the Tabernacle under Eli's care."[20] The subsequent verse depicts Hannah giving birth to a son and naming him Samuel, which means "heard by God," or "name of God."[21] This name holds significance, signifying that God heard her prayers and answered them by God. *In The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the authors wrote, "Shortly after Hannah's return to Ramah, she conceived and in due course bore a son whom she named … Samuel. Though the name technically means 'his name is God' or something similar, Hannah may, by assonance, have understood the name to mean 'asked of God.' She had 'asked' (*šā'al*) God for a son, and He had 'heard' (*šāma'*) her. 'Samuel,' then, would be associated with

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[19] 1 Samuel 1:19.

[20] K. A. Mathews, "The Historical Books," in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed D. S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 110.

[21] "1 Samuel 1 Commentary Precept Austin," https://www.preceptaustin.org/1-samuel-1-commentary.

šămūa' 'ēl, "heard of God," because she had asked the LORD for him."[22] This pivotal moment marks the culmination of Hannah's longing for a child. It signifies God's direct involvement in fulfilling her heartfelt desire. Samuel's birth becomes a testament to the power of prayer, faith, and God's responsiveness to the pleas of the faithful.

(vv. 21-24)

Following the birth of Samuel, Elkanah took his household to Shiloh for their yearly sacrifice to the Lord. However, not everyone in the household attended this annual pilgrimage. Hannah remained home to nurse and care for her newborn son until someone weaned him. Once Samuel is old enough, Hannah fulfills her vow to the Lord during her anguish. H. M. Wolf writes, "After the birth of Samuel, Elkanah returns to Shiloh to offer the annual sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow he has made. Perhaps he had prayed for his flocks and crops and God had prospered him. Hannah does not accompany her husband, but nurses Samuel until he is weaned, probably at three years of age. True to her promise, she then brings him to the tabernacle and turns him over to Eli."[23] She takes Samuel to the tabernacle in Shiloh, bringing sacrifices, including three bulls, flour, and a skin of wine, to present to the Lord.

Hannah presented her son, Samuel, at the Tabernacle in Shiloh, fulfilling the vow she had made to dedicate him to the service of the Lord. This act reflects Hannah's commitment to honoring her promise to God and delivering Samuel into a life devoted to

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[22] Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985) Logos Bible Software.

[23] Wolf, H. M., "1-2 Samuel." In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 194.

serving God. Along with the presentation of Samuel, Hannah also presented sacrifices before the Lord: "a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine."[24] These items were offered as sacrifices because it was customary to bring certain items with the bull when you vow to the Lord. Moses in Numbers 15:8-10 writes, "When you offer a bull as a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as an offering of well-being to the Lord, then you shall present with the bull a grain offering, three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour, mixed with half a hin of oil, and you shall present as a drink offering half a hin of wine, as an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the Lord." H. M. Wolf writes, "On this occasion, she also sacrifices a bull in fulfillment of her vow (Num. 15:8–10) and reminds Eli that she had prayed for a child in his hearing."[25] This action fulfilled her vow to dedicate her son to the service of the Lord for his entire life. The sacrifices represented an offering of thanksgiving and commitment to God, acknowledging the blessing of a child and demonstrating her commitment to fulfilling her promise by dedicating her most precious gift, Samuel, to the service of God.

In the latter half of 1 Samuel 1:24, Hannah brought Samuel to the house of the Lord. Wolf writes, "It was not easy for Hannah to give up her little boy and allow him to be brought up by someone else. Eli is not a very good father (2:12), but Hannah is primarily giving Samuel to the Lord."[26] By giving Samuel to God, Hannah acknowledges and honors God's sovereignty over her son's life. She believed Samuel belonged to God and that God directed his purpose and life. Hannah's offering of Samuel to the Lord

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[24] 1 Samuel 1:24.

[25] H. M. Wolf, "1-2 Samuel," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 194.

[26] Wolf, "1-2 Samuel," 194.

expresses gratitude for the gift of a child. Her act of thanksgiving exemplifies her acknowledgment of God's blessing and her willingness to give back to God in recognition of His goodness. Hannah's act was not merely a fulfillment of a vow but a testament to her unshakable faith and commitment to honoring God. This act showcased her unwavering faith and set the stage for Samuel's extraordinary destiny in becoming a revered prophet and judge in Israel's history.

1 Samuel 3:19-21 - Samuel's Calling and Prophetic Activity

(vv.1-10)

These verses describe a crucial event in the life of the young Samuel, who serves in the temple under Eli's tutelage. This passage begins by addressing the spiritual context of the time. The word of the Lord was rare in those days, and visions were infrequent. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, signifying the importance of this night, which would soon bring about a significant revelation. While Samuel rests in the temple, the Lord calls out to him. Samuel, not yet familiar with the voice of God, mistakes it for Eli calling him. This interaction repeats itself three times, highlighting Samuel's lack of recognition of the divine presence and the persistence of the call. Eli eventually comprehends that the Lord is calling Samuel and instructs him to respond. When the Lord calls again, Samuel listens attentively, responding openly to the Lord's message. This exchange demonstrates Samuel's willingness to serve and his growing receptivity to God's call. The culmination of these verses occurs when the Lord comes and stands, calling Samuel as before. Samuel responds as Eli instructed, saying, "Speak, for your

servant is listening."[27] At this moment, Samuel becomes fully open and receptive to direct communication from God. J. R. Vannoy writes, "After describing the scarcity of the prophetic word in the time of the judges (3:1) and the failing eyesight of the elderly Eli (3:2; cf. 2:22 where we are told 'Eli was very old'), we are given a description of how the Lord spoke directly to Samuel for the first time (3:3–9). Eli and Samuel slept within the Tabernacle precincts, with Samuel's place being close to the Ark of God" [28] The significance of these verses lies in Samuel's transition from a state of ignorance and inexperience regarding divine communication to a crucial turning point in which he begins to understand and respond to the voice of God.

(vv.11-18)

These verses delve into the prophecy revealed to Samuel regarding the judgment upon Eli's household. The Lord tells Samuel that He will perform a significant and shocking act against Eli and his household, making the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. This foreshadows a severe and impactful event that will bring dismay. The prophecy explains that God will fulfill this judgment due to the iniquity of Eli's house. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, have committed grievous sins, showing blatant disrespect for the Lord by dishonoring the sacrifices and taking for themselves what belonged to God. Their actions have defiled the sanctity of the priesthood, leading to this impending judgment. Samuel is understandably reluctant to disclose this dire message to

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[27] 1 Samuel 3:9.

[28] J. R. Vannoy, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1-2 Samuel*, vol. 4 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 63.

Eli, fearing his reaction. However, Eli insists that Samuel reveal everything the Lord told him. "Eli's words sound harsh, but they were probably intended to encourage Samuel to share the full details of his revelation. This was the standard form of an oath."[29] After Eli implores Samuel to speak the truth, Samuel relays the prophecy, sparing no details. Eli accepts the judgment as being from God, signifying his submission to God's will despite the sorrowful consequences. Author Ronald Wallace writes, "This was the beginning of Samuel's being acknowledged and listened to continually, over all Israel, as a prophet of the Lord."[30]

(vv.19-21)

These verses detail Samuel's growth and the establishment of his prophetic ministry. Verse 19 highlights the divine support for Samuel's words as he grows. It mentions how God was with Samuel and ensured his words were fulfilled. This underlines the authority and credibility of Samuel's prophecies, solidifying his role as a true prophet of the Lord. Verse 20 emphasizes Samuel's growing reputation as a trustworthy prophet in Israel. All of Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, recognized Samuel as a legitimate spokesperson for God, indicating his prophetic ministry's widespread acceptance and influence. Samuel's ongoing relationship with the Lord is emphasized, highlighting how the Lord continued to reveal Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by speaking to him. This consistent communication signifies the continuation of God's guidance and the ongoing development of Samuel's prophetic calling. Matthew

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[29] B. E. Beyer, "1 Samuel" in *CSB Study Bible: Notes,* eds. E. A. Blum and T. Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 416.

[30] Ronald S. Wallace, *Hannah* (Grand Rapides, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 51.

Henry writes, “All increase in wisdom and grace, is owing to the presence of God with us. God will graciously repeat his visits to those who receive them aright. Early piety will be the greatest honour of young people. Those who honour God he will honour. Let young people consider the piety of Samuel, and from him they will learn to remember their Creator in the days of their youth. Young children are capable of religion. Samuel is a proof that their waiting upon the Lord will be pleasing to him. He is a pattern of all those amiable tempers, which are the brightest ornament of youth, and a sure source of happiness.”[31] This was due to Hannah’s bringing Samuel to the Lord at Shiloh. This action set in motion Samuel’s life of service and spiritual leadership, impacting the course of the nation’s history and illustrating the depth of faith and dedication to God.

Conclusion

In 1 Samuel 1:24, Hannah fulfills her vow to God by bringing her son, Samuel, to the temple. She presents him to Eli, the priest, in service to the Lord as she had promised. This act displays Hannah’s unwavering commitment to God. It marks the beginning of Samuel’s life dedicated to serving in the sanctuary, setting the stage for his extraordinary destiny as a pivotal figure in Israel’s history. Jumping ahead to 1 Samuel 3:19-21, this passage signifies a turning point in Samuel’s life. Samuel, who initially mistook the voice of God for that of his mentor Eli, begins to comprehend and respond to God’s call. “When Yahweh called Samuel for the first time, leaving the boy confused, Eli taught him

[31] Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997)

the proper manner in which to respond to the divine call."[32] Here, it's highlighted that God was with Samuel as he grew, ensuring the fulfillment of all his prophetic words. The narrative emphasizes Samuel's rising reputation as a trusted prophet throughout Israel, recognized for his authentic connection to God and the accurate fulfillment of his prophecies. Combining these passages, 1 Samuel 1:24 marks the inception of Samuel's life's commitment to God's service, fulfilling Hannah's vow. First Samuel 3:19-21 showcases Samuel's maturation and the establishment of his role as a genuine prophet, validated by God's support and the acknowledgment of the entire nation, laying the groundwork for Samuel's influential and revered position in Israel's spiritual and political landscape. Both sections, when connected, portray the fulfillment of Hannah's promise and the subsequent rise of Samuel as a significant prophet and leader in Israel's history due to his unwavering dedication and divine endorsement.

The passages 1 Samuel 1:24 and 3:19-21 relate to my doctoral project because they show a parent bringing her child to the house of God. One of the problems impacting Legacy Pointe Church is the lack of attendance and engagement from our middle and high school students. If the youth leaders motivate parents and guardians by providing volunteer opportunities and demonstrating positive outcomes, the middle and high school students' attendance and engagement with Legacy Pointe Church will increase. I picked this passage because it shows that youth can find their true purpose and identity when they are engaged with a church. Dedicating Samuel to God's service in 1 Samuel 1:24 emphasizes the significance of offering one's life in service to a higher

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[32] Kamal Suleiman Salibi, *The Historicity of Biblical Israel: Studies in 1 & 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: NABU Publications, 1998), 73.

purpose. It serves as a reminder that a life devoted to serving others or a higher cause can lead to profound impacts, echoing the value of selfless dedication and service in our lives today. 1 Samuel 3:19-21 illustrates Samuel's learning to recognize and respond to God's voice. It teaches us the importance of being attentive to God's guidance and learning to discern and heed His calling. It teaches us to stay open and responsive to God's direction amidst life's noise and distractions.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Progressive Era, from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, marked a pivotal period in American history characterized by social, political, and economic reforms. In his book, *Take Back The Center*, Peter S. Wenz wrote about the state of the economy during this time. "The United States has a crumbling physical infrastructure — roads, bridges, dams, levies, electrical grid, and more — as well as an underused and poorly prepared human infrastructure — unemployment, underemployment, school dropouts, students less prepared than those in competitor countries, and higher education that many in the middle class cannot afford."[1]

Amidst the diverse domains impacted by this revolutionary movement, education was a pivotal point for advocates endeavoring to modify conventional pedagogical approaches to accommodate the dynamic demands of a swiftly evolving populace. They observed a determined attempt to transform educational methods throughout the Progressive Era, emphasizing the need of family participation, educational equity, and child welfare in creating a new educational environment.

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[1] Peter S. Wenz, *Take Back the Center: Progressive Taxation for a New Progressive Agenda* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 1.

During the Progressive Era, there was a shift in educational philosophy. Amidst the Industrial Revolution and urbanization, the United States experienced a profound societal transformation. This transition fueled the need for educational reform, as traditional schooling methods no longer adequately met the demands of an increasingly industrialized nation. Reformers, influenced by the Progressive Era movement, sought to create a more dynamic, responsive educational system. "The task of education, as understood at present, is to lead growing individuals to more and more intelligent, wide, well-organized, and rich forms of experience through guidance, through selection of subject matter, and by providing an environment which is stimulating to self-direction." [2] Their goal was to prepare students for an evolving workforce and equip them with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing society.

One of the key hallmarks of the Progressive Era's impact on education was the emphasis on child welfare and development. During this period, "the United States became the first national government in the world to create an agency dedicated to the welfare of children, and its founding director (or "Chief," as she was called) was Julia Lathrop, the first woman to head a U.S. agency. The legislation establishing the bureau ordered it to "investigate and report . . . upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people."[3] Education reformers such as John Dewey promoted a child-centered approach to education that prioritized each

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[2] Hilda Taba, *The Dynamics of Education: A Methodology of Progressive Educational Thought* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), 218.

[3] James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (New York, NY: University Press, 2014), 17.

student's unique needs and interests. This approach avoided the rote memorization and structured curricula common in traditional education to emphasize problem-solving, critical thinking, and hands-on learning.

Progressive teachers promoted more accountability in the classroom and standardized curricula. This approach sought to guarantee a uniform level of education across the country and set minimum requirements for schools. The curriculum creation and standardized testing practices from this era are still present in modern schooling. By focusing on experiential learning and real-world applications, educators at this period questioned established teaching practices. They promoted active learning by having pupils interact with their surroundings.

Equity in education became increasingly important during the Progressive Era. Progressive reformers stressed the value of giving everyone equal access to education regardless of socioeconomic status. Several problems were addressed, including unequal resource distribution, insufficient school infrastructure, and differences in access to high-quality education. To level the playing field, progressive educators pushed for changes, including mandated attendance policies, enhanced teacher preparation programs, and uniform curricula. There was progress during this pivotal time in American history, but obstacles remained, and establishing true educational parity remained a continuous endeavor.

During the Progressive Era Educational Movement, parental involvement was significant. The idea of family engagement in education underwent a significant change throughout the Progressive Era. Reformers acknowledged that parents were vital to their children's growth and intellectual achievement. Parent education campaigns were started

to teach parents about hygienic habits, child development, and growth and development. Two ways schools promoted parental participation were parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and outreach initiatives that emphasized the need for an active relationship between educators and parents for a child's educational journey.

I decided to concentrate on the Progressive Era Educational Movement because it marked a crucial juncture in American history when perspectives on social change, education, and community involvement experienced profound shifts. Around this time, attempts to reform and enhance the educational system grew out of an increasing awareness of education's role in forming people as individuals and as communities. New educational philosophies prioritizing experiential learning, child-centered learning, and integrating practical skills with academic subjects emerged during the Progressive Era. These principles are in line with the objectives of encouraging parental involvement in the church since they both place a strong emphasis on the value of empowering people and communities via involvement and education.

A larger social movement towards greater civic involvement and social responsibility typified the Progressive Era, and this movement can offer important lessons for improving parental engagement in the church. Many of the reformers and activists of this era used community mobilization, grassroots organizing, and stakeholder collaboration to address social challenges including injustice, poverty, and inequality. We can learn practical methods for encouraging parental involvement in the church and a sense of ownership, responsibility, and unity among members toward the shared objectives of social justice, spiritual development, and community service by examining the tactics and tenets of the Progressive Era Educational Movement.

A Shift in Educational Philosophy

The Progressive Era marked a profound shift in educational philosophy, challenging traditional paradigms and setting the stage for a more dynamic and inclusive approach to learning. One writer believes the genesis of the Progressive Era began, "after the First World War, in the wake of dramatic social, economic, and political changes in Ontario, the rhetoric of progressive education took root and began to spread throughout the province. The war had transformed the world, and schools no longer seemed suitable for the modern age. Progressive education would be required for a progressive age. We are following to this day the wake of that progressive movement." [4]

During the Progressive Education period, diverse perspectives emerged, reflecting varied opinions on the optimal approaches to teaching and learning. In an article, Dr. Jessica Spallino, posits, "The fundamental principles of the progressive movement during the 1920's challenged the established clinical approach to teaching and learning aligned to standards-based testing and compliance training."[5] George Hein quotes Lawrence Cremin, when he wrote this concerning the Progressive Education Era: "Progressive education began as part of a vast humanitarian effort to apply the promise of American life — the ideal of government by, of, and for the people — to the puzzling new urban-industrial civilization that came into being during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The word progressive provides a clue to what it really was: the educational phase of

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[4] Theodore Michael Christou, *Progressive Education: Revisioning and Reframing Ontario's Public Schools, 1919-1942* (Toronto Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3.

[5] Jessica Spallino, "The Progressive Movement: An Enduring Inspiration in Public," March 4, 2022, https://www.methodschools.org/blog/the-progressive-movement-an-enduring-inspiration-in-education.

American Progressivism writ large. In effect, progressive education began as Progressivism in education: a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals."[6] However, amidst this diversity of views on progressive education, a common thread was the emphasis on student-centered and experiential learning.

A key aspect of the shift in educational philosophy during the progressive era was a departure from rigid, rote memorization towards a more experiential and student-centered approach. Progressive educators, influenced by the ideas of philosophers like John Dewey, emphasized learning by doing. They believed students should actively engage with their environment, fostering critical thinking and practical skills. This departure from passive learning marked a fundamental shift in how education was perceived and delivered.

John Dewey

John Dewey, a prominent philosopher and educational reformer, played a significant role during the Progressive Era. Dewey's ideas had a profound impact on education, politics, and social reform during this period. In his book, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, Herbert M. Kliebard wrote, "It was during his Michigan period that Dewey took his first tentative steps in the direction of a serious involvement in educational matters. First, his marriage to Alice Chipman and the subsequent births of their children seemed to arouse in him a natural curiosity about children's mental growth

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[6] George E. Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice: John Dewey and Democracy* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 10.

and how they gain increasing intellectual command of their world."[7] He advocated for a pragmatic and experiential approach to learning, emphasizing the importance of education in fostering democracy and social progress. Dewey contributed to other areas, including political and social issues. He believed that democracy should extend beyond the political realm and permeate all aspects of society, including education. Dewey saw education to create informed and engaged citizens who could contribute to the betterment of society.

Dewey believed that education should be student-centered and that it should prepare individual for active participation in a democratic society. Dewey stated, "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life.[8]" In another book, Dewey writes, "The child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education."[9] He argued against traditional rote learning and advocated for a more hands-on, interactive, and inquiry-based approach. Dewey's educational philosophy aimed to cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a sense of community responsibility. Dewey's ideas gained traction as reformers sought solutions to the social and economic challenges of the time. His influence extended to various fields, including psychology, philosophy, and sociology.

Dewey's pragmatic philosophy emphasized that knowledge should be practical and applicable to real-life situations. He believed in the continuity of experience, where

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[7] Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958: 1893-1958* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 29.

[8] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 3.

[9] John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education and My Pedagogic Creed With a Critical Introduction by John Dewey: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey* (Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press, 2018), 36.

learning is an ongoing process rooted in everyday life. This approach contrasted with traditional educational models that isolated theoretical knowledge from practical application. In Dewey's view, schools should reflect democratic ideals, mirroring the collaborative and participatory nature of a democratic society. He envisioned classrooms as communities where students actively engage in meaningful tasks, promoting cooperation and social skills. Dewey's, learning by doing, approach encouraged experimentation and problem-solving, fostering a dynamic and interactive educational environment. Dewey's legacy endures as his ideas continue to shape educational theories and practices. His contributions played a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape and influencing broader social and political changes.

The shift in educational philosophy during the Progressive Era was characterized by a move towards experiential learning, a focus on educational equity, a call for standardized and accountability, and an emphasis on community and parental engagement. These progressive ideals laid the foundation for modern educational practices, influencing pedagogical methods, curriculum development, and the broader societal perception of the role of education in shaping individuals and communities.

Dewey championed experimental learning, which was a fundamental aspect of the Progressive Era educational movement. Experimental learning reflected a departure from traditional, rote-based teaching methods. American philosopher Jane Martin wrote, "Children should learn by doing"[10] is a slogan long associated with Dewey and progressive education. He emphasized learning by doing, arguing that students should

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[10] Jane Roland Martin, *School Was Our Life: Remembering Progressive Education* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 48.

actively engage with their environment and experiences to construct knowledge. Dewey's philosophy had a profound impact on shaping the experimental learning approach during this period.

Progressive educators rejected the prevailing emphasis on rote memorization and passive learning. Instead, they promoted active participation, encouraging students to explore, question, and experiment with concepts. This shift aimed to develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of subjects. Experimental learning often manifested through project-based learning, where students worked on real-world projects or extended tasks. This approach allowed students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, fostering problem-solving skills and a more profound understanding of the subject matter.

Educators sought to break down the rigid barriers between subjects, promoting interdisciplinary and integrated learning experiences. This holistic approach aimed to reflect the interconnectedness of knowledge and provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of the world. The Progressive Era saw a rise in experimental education, where learning occurred through direct experiences. Field trips, hands-on experiments, and interactive activities became integral components of the curriculum. These experiences were designed to stimulate students' curiosity and facilitate a more active and engaging learning process.

Experimental learning during the Progressive Era recognized the importance of social interaction in the learning process. Collaborative projects and group activities were encouraged to foster teamwork, communication skills, and a sense of community within the classroom. Progressive educators acknowledged the diverse learning styles and

interests of students. “Progressive educators strongly disagree with traditional visions of education on many levels and have set forth their own ideas on the content of curriculum, materials to be used, and roles to be played in teaching this curriculum.”[11] Experimental learning allowed for more individualized instruction, accommodating the unique needs and preferences of each learner. This approach aimed to make education more relevant and engaging for every student.

Experimental learning emphasized the application of knowledge to real-world contexts. Educators believed that students would better retain and understand information when it was connected to their daily lives and experiences. This approach aimed to prepare students for active participation in a rapidly changing society. Experimental learning was a central tenet of the Progressive Era’s educational movement. By prioritizing active engagement, real-world application, and interdisciplinary approaches, educators aimed to create a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment that fostered critical thinking, creativity, and a lifelong love for learning.

The Progressive Era witnessed a push for educational equity. Reformers advocated for equal opportunities in education, challenging the disparities in resources, facilities, and access to quality learning. The belief in the transformative power of education to level societal inequalities became a driving force, laying the groundwork for ongoing discussions about educational fairness. In her book, *Reading for Reform*, Laura Fisher, suggested how “literature was used to raise awareness, inspire empathy, and contribute to the educational efforts of the time. The Progressive Era was marked by a

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[11] Kristan Accles Morrison, *Free School Teaching: A Journey into Radical Progressive Education* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 73.

desire to address social problems through various means, and literature was recognized as a powerful medium for fostering understanding and change."[12] Standardized and accountability emerged as another significant theme during this period. Standardization in education refers to the establishment of common curricula, testing procedures, and educational benchmarks to ensure uniformity and measure student performance consistently.

Progressive educators sought to establish minimum standards for schools, ensuring a consistent quality of education across the nation. This emphasis on accountability aimed to measure educational outcomes and improve the overall effectiveness of the educational system, reflecting a broader societal focus on efficiency and progress. Educators challenged the rigid and standardized approaches of traditional education. They argued a one size fits all model, emphasizing the need for individualized, experiential learning that considered students' diverse backgrounds, interest, and abilities. In Mary Rasmussen book, *Progressive Sexuality Education*, she wrote "Sexuality education cannot be isolated from the broader social context, including issues such as religiosity, race and ethnicity, social class, and state policies on abortion. Whether one is for or against teaching about religion in public school contexts, religion is always going to be a significant part of many young people's cultural contexts."[13]

Critics of standardization during the Progressive Era expressed concerns about the reliance on standardized testing as the primary measure of student achievement. They

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[12] Laura R Fisher, *Reading for Reform: The Social Work of Literature in the Progressive Era* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 3.

[13] Mary Louise Rasmussen, *Progressive Sexuality Education: The Conceits of Secularism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 29.

argued that such assessments often overlooked important aspects of a student's intellectual and social development. Progressive education emphasized adaptability in the curriculum to address the changing needs of society. Rather than adhering strictly to standardized content, educators sought to create flexible learning environments that prepared students for active participation in a dynamic world.

Progressive educators recognized the importance of fostering not only academic but also social and emotional growth. They believed that standardized methods might neglect crucial aspects of a child's development, such as creativity, critical thinking, and social skills. This era led to shifts in education policies, with some regions embracing elements of standardization and others leaning toward more progressive, individualized approaches. This period marked the beginning of ongoing debates about the balance between standardized testing and fostering a well-rounded, adaptable education system.

Child welfare and development became significant focal points with the Progressive Era's educational movement. Reformers and educators recognized education's integral role in shaping young minds' well-being and potential. Author and educator Stanwood Cobb wrote, "Progressive education says, in the case of the young child give priority to the health. Make sure of a healthy body at all costs. It is an educational crime to deprive the child of its natural dowry of good health. It is a sin of omission not to improve that health to the utmost and build for the child's future a foundation of sound, physical structure."[14] Several key aspects contributed to the evolving landscape of child welfare and development during this transformative period.

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[14] Stanwood Cobb, "Health must come first," in *The New Leaven: Progressive Education and Its Effect Upon the Child and Society* (New York, NY: John Day Company, 1928), 28.

Child-centered education witnessed a shift, aligning with the philosophies of educational reformers like John Dewey. This approach emphasized understanding each child's individual needs, interests, and developmental stage. It marked a departure from traditional, rigid educational methods towards more personalized and adaptive teaching.

Progressive educators believed in learning by doing. They introduced hands-on, experiential learning methods allowing children to actively engage with their environment. This approach not only fostered intellectual development but also contributed to the social and emotional growth of the child, recognizing the importance of a holistic approach to education. Attention was on the physical well-being of children during the Progressive Era. School lunch programs and health inspections were implemented to address issues of malnutrition and hygiene. This emphasis caused the recognition of the connection between a child's physical health and learning ability. These initiatives aimed to create a healthier environment for optimal development.

Progressive reforms led to the establishment of compulsory education laws, requiring children to attend school for several years. This initiative aimed to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, had access to education. The notion of compulsory education was grounded in the belief that education was crucial for individual development and societal progress. Progressive educators believed in preparing students for active citizenship. The curriculum expanded to include social studies and civics, instilling a sense of civic responsibility and community engagement in children. Laura Tisdall writes, "A child-centered curriculum, therefore, not self-government, was at the center of this 'educational revolution;' non-utopian progressive pedagogy advised that if subjects were taught in accordance with children's natural

interests, and in line with their capabilities at various stages of development, then pupils would learn most effectively."[15] This approach aimed to develop not only informed individuals but also responsible citizens contributing to the betterment of society.

Progressive educators acknowledged the importance of play in child development. Playgrounds were incorporated into school designs, and recess became a recognized and valued part of the school day. The understanding that play contributes to physical, social, and emotional development underscored a more comprehensive approach to child welfare. The progressive era laid the groundwork for recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of children. Efforts were made to provide education tailored to children with special needs, marking a shift towards inclusivity and a more compassionate understanding of individual differences.

Community engagement was a hallmark of the Progressive Era's educational philosophy. Schools were envisioned not merely as places of learning but as community centers that fostered collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Progressive educators emphasized the idea of community schools, viewing education as an integral part of the broader community. These schools aimed to serve not only as centers for academic learning but also as hubs for community services and engagement. The community school model sought to address social issues and provide a holistic approach to education.

Educators during this era actively sought collaborations with various social agencies and organizations. The goal was to address the social and economic challenges

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[15] Laura Tisdall, A Progressive Education?: How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools (Manchester, IN: Manchester University Press, 2020), 3.

faced by students and their families. This collaborative approach aimed to create a comprehensive support system, recognizing that educational success was intertwined with broader social factors. Educators recognized the importance of connecting classroom learning to students' lived experiences within their communities. This approach aimed to make education more meaningful and applicable to students' everyday lives. Educators promoted practical learning and vocational education that met the local community's needs. This approach aimed to equip students with skills relevant to their communities, preparing them for meaningful societal contributions. Vocational education was often integrated into the curriculum to provide students with practical skills for employment within their community.

The Progressive Era recognized the impact of socioeconomic disparities on education. Community engagement strategies aimed to address these disparities by implementing reforms that considered students' diverse needs and backgrounds. This included efforts to equalize educational opportunities and resources across different communities. The emphasis on community engagement had a lasting impact on students' social and cultural awareness. By connecting education to the local community, students better understood the social issues and cultural dynamics within their surroundings.

Community-based education programs, which try to include parents in their children's education outside the traditional school setting, became more popular throughout the Progressive Era. For instance, settlement houses offered social services, recreational opportunities, and educational programs to immigrant families and marginalized communities. To promote cooperation between parents and educators in assisting children's holistic development, these centers frequently offered classes for

parents on subjects like parenting techniques, English language education, and vocational training. Through the provision of extracurricular educational activities and active parental involvement in their children's education, these community-based projects embodied the progressive principles of social change, empowerment, and inclusivity.

Progressive educators of this era also stressed the value of home-school collaborations in supporting children's academic achievement and general well-being. They understood that parental involvement included more than just showing up to school functions and helping in the classroom; it also included fostering a nurturing atmosphere at home that promotes learning. As a response, teachers gave parents tools and advice on how to help their children learn at home. Some of these tips included creating consistent study schedules, reiterating school material, and fostering a love of learning through interesting activities. The Progressive Era Education Movement aimed to improve the relationship between families and schools by encouraging parent-teacher collaboration inside and outside the classroom. This would eventually improve children's social mobility and educational outcomes across a variety of diverse communities.

Significant changes in attitudes about parental engagement occurred in education during the Progressive Era. Progressive educators acknowledged the value of including parents in the educational process. A collaborative paradigm that urged parents to engage in their children's education actively replaced the previous, more authoritarian, top-down methodology. To replace the previous, more authoritarian, top-down methodology with a participatory strategy that emphasized cooperation between educators and families, PTAs emerged as crucial facilitators of this collaborative paradigm. They encouraged parents to engage in their children's education actively.

Parent-teacher associations (PTAs) were a key component of the progressive era education movement, which sought to increase parental involvement. Parent Teacher Associations have grown in popularity to promote dialogue and cooperation between educators and parents. PTAs gave teachers a forum to talk about curriculum policies, exchange data on children's development, and build a feeling of community inside the classroom. Parents and teachers could work together closely on issues pertaining to children's education and welfare on these groups. To debate curriculum, school policy, and methods to improve the learning environment, PTAs arranged frequent meetings for parents to interact with teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Parents were enabled by PTAs to actively participate in their children's education and advocate for systemic changes by creating a climate of open communication and mutual understanding between educators and parents.

Progressive educators, influenced by the ideas of John Dewey and others, advocated for parents to be partners in the educational process. Parental engagement "finds ground on commonsense knowledge of a continuity of educational roles, values, and experiences between family and school, as well as on schools and teachers' expectations regarding certain learning preconditions developed in the home, and the incentives certain parents place on educational achievement."[16] They believed that involving parents would create a more supportive and holistic learning environment, aligning with the progressive philosophy of addressing the whole child, including their social and emotional development. "Curriculum leaders must develop involvement

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[16] Maria Eulina Carvalho, *Rethinking Family-School Relations: A Critique of Parental Involvement in Schooling* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 1.

strategies that provide parents and guardians with the knowledge and skills to help children master the curriculum objectives at home."[17] The Progressive Era witnessed the emergence of the concept of community schools, which aimed to integrate education with community services. Parents were encouraged to participate not only in school-related activities but also in broader community initiatives, promoting a collaborative approach to education and social improvement.

Progressive educators recognized the significance of the home-school connection in a child's education. Author Arina Bokas wrote, "In almost all other nations, parents are not expected to volunteer or fundraise for schools. It is broadly accepted that parental involvement in student learning matters most at home. This aligns with the important role that parents play in fostering life-long learning dispositions in their children and in nurturing home learning environments that promote academic, social, and emotional growth."[18] They encouraged teachers to understand the cultural and familial backgrounds of their students, fostering a partnership between home and school to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. "It is a fact too seldom remembered that school and home are partners in the education of a nation's young."[19] While there was a push for increased parental involvement, challenges and tensions existed. Socioeconomic disparities often influenced the extent to which parents could participate actively.

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[17] Rose M. Ylimaki, *Critical Curriculum Leadership: A Framework for Progressive Education* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 151.

[18] Arina Bokas, *Building Powerful Learning Environments: From Schools to Communities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016), 90.

[19] Jane Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families* (Cambridge, MA: First Harvard University Press, 1992), 6.

Moreover, some educators and parents had differing views on the appropriate level of parental influence in educational matters.

The push for parental involvement during the progressive era contributed to changes in educational policies. It influenced the development of more inclusive and community-oriented approaches, acknowledging that education was not solely the responsibility of schools but a shared endeavor involving families and communities. The Progressive Era marked a shift towards greater parental involvement in education, reflecting the broader societal changes of the time. This emphasis on collaboration and community engagement laid the groundwork for ongoing discussions about the role of parents in education and the importance of a holistic, student-centered approach.

Parents used a variety of tactics throughout the Progressive Era to spread the word about and rally support for progressive objectives. Putting together neighborhood gatherings and protests where parents could congregate to talk about problems, exchange information, and devise plans of action was one popular strategy. These events gave people a forum to express their worries, share ideas, and plan actions to achieve shared objectives. In addition, parents engaged with their communities and raised awareness of significant social and political concerns by using grassroots organizing strategies like canvassing doors, handing out brochures, and holding educational seminars.

Moreover, parents were instrumental in garnering support by means of letter-writing campaigns addressed to legislators, media outlets, and prominent individuals. Parents have been able to create public pressure and advocate for legislative action on subjects like women's suffrage, child labor regulations, and public health programs by articulating their concerns, sharing personal stories, and pushing for particular policy

reforms. Furthermore, parents worked together with groups and individuals who shared their values to create coalitions and alliances, which strengthened their voice as a group and increased their influence on politics. During this pivotal time in American history, parents were able to rally support, raise awareness, and make significant changes on a wide range of progressive concerns through these coordinated activities.

Conclusion

While the Progressive Era's educational movement primarily focused on public education, some of its principles can be applied to enhance parental involvement in church education. The emphasis on community engagement and collaboration from the Progressive Era aligns with the ideas of fostering a sense of community within a church setting. Applying progressive educational principles may involve creating opportunities for parents to actively participate in their children's religious education. This could include interactive workshops, family-oriented events, or collaborative projects that encourage both parents and children to engage with religious teachings. In his book, *Parenting by God's Promises*, Joel Beeke writes, "as they grow, we should engage our children in daily family worship and bring them to church each Lord's Day, training them to take part in the public worship of God."[20] By adopting a more experiential and community-focused approach, churches can draw inspiration from the Progressive Era's educational philosophy to strengthen the connection between parents, children, and the church community.

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[20] Joel R. Beeke, *Parenting by God's Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 53.

Incorporating progressive educational principals into church activities can also involve recognizing and catering to diverse learning styles and preferences among parents. Much like the Progressive Era's acknowledgment of different student needs, churches can offer a variety of learning opportunities and resources to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and learning preferences of parents involved in religious education. Ultimately, adapting certain progressive educational principles can provide a framework for enhancing parental involvement in church education, fostering a more inclusive and participatory religious learning environment.

The Progressive Era's educational movement was a watershed moment in the history of American education, marked by a departure from traditional methods and a profound shift towards student-centered, experiential learning. As the nation grappled with the challenges of a rapidly changing society, educational reformers during this period sought to create a more dynamic and relevant approach to schooling. Pioneering figures like John Dewey, played a pivotal role in shaping the progressive educational philosophy, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to influence contemporary educational practices.

At the heart of the Progressive Era's educational movement was the rejection of rote memorization in favor of experimental learning. This transformative shift recognized the limitations of passive learning and embraced hands-on experiences, projects, and real-world applications of knowledge. The movement sought to cultivate critical thinking skills, foster creativity, and prepare students for an evolving world where adaptability and problem-solving would be paramount. Project-based learning emerged as a hallmark of the progressive approach. It offered students opportunities to engage in extended tasks

that required collaboration and application of acquired knowledge. This emphasis on active participation resonated with the belief that education should not be confined to the classroom but should extend into the real-world contexts that students would encounter in their lives.

Interdisciplinary and integrated learning were integral components of the progressive educational movement. Breaking down the artificial barriers between subjects, educators aimed to provide students with a holistic understanding of the world. This approach recognized the interconnectedness of knowledge and sought to equip students with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of an increasingly interconnected society. The movement also placed a strong emphasis on social interaction and community engagement within the educational context. Collaborative projects and group activities were designed not only to enhance the learning experience but also to instill a sense of communal responsibility. The involvement of parents and communities in the educational process reflected a commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Individualized instruction emerged as a response to the diverse learning styles and interests of students. Progressive educators recognized that a one size fits all approach was inadequate, and they sought to tailor instruction to meet the unique needs of each learner. This personalized approach aimed to make education more relevant, ensuring that it addressed the distinct characteristics and strengthens of individual students. Beyond the classroom, the progressive era educational movement contributed to a broader societal shift in the perception of schools. They were no longer viewed solely as institutions for academic instruction but also as centers for community engagement and

social reform. The philosophy of experimental learning and active citizenship promoted by progressive educators reflected a commitment to preparing students not only for personal success but also for responsible participation in a democratic society.

In conclusion, the Progressive Era's educational movement was a transformative force that reshaped the landscape of American education. Its influence is evident in the ongoing emphasis on student-centered, experimental learning, and its legacy continues to shape modern educational philosophies. By fostering critical thinking, embracing interdisciplinary approaches, and promoting community engagement, the movement laid the foundation for an educational paradigm that recognizes the evolving needs of students and society at large.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical stewardship is a central idea in Christianity that stresses the prudent use and management of the resources that God has entrusted to people. Fundamentally, biblical stewardship recognizes that God ultimately owns everything we have, including our time, talents, belongings, and even our lives. In contrast, humans do not own natural resources. Instead, humans are stewards or caregivers of natural resources. Multiple biblical teachings, such as the parables of the rich fool and the talents, urge people to manage their blessings judiciously and diligently.

The practical application of biblical stewardship is acknowledging that everything belongs to God. Deliberately choosing how to use resources will further God's goals and values. This includes giving generously of money, protecting the environment, making moral decisions, and building relationships. "Stewardship is all about relationships."[1] Biblical stewardship also strongly emphasizes accountability, requiring people to account for how they have used the resources entrusted to them. Biblical stewardship ultimately calls Christians to lead lives with thankfulness, moral morality, and a vital duty toward God and others.

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[1] Ken Sloane, *Guidelines Stewardship: Raise Up Generous Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 9.

Some biblical stories offer admirable illustrations of people who raised their children well by teaching them morality and religion. Joshua is a well-known biblical character who displays exemplary care for his offspring. Leading the Israelites into the Promised Land with bravery and conviction, Joshua was Moses' successor. Joshua's unwavering dedication to serving the Lord moved Joshua's family and the Israelite community. Joshua famously states in Joshua 24:15, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." This statement demonstrates Joshua's commitment to fostering a strong reverence for God in his family and ensuring that his offspring would continue to be faithful in their adoration of the Lord. Joshua's leadership and spiritual direction exemplify how parental stewardship can have a transformative impact on the faith and character of future generations.

Stewardship is more than giving money. It is about wisely managing all the resources, time, skills, and connections. This idea is embodied in church-based parental involvement, which produces a sense of collective responsibility and spiritual growth among families. By helping them to comprehend and accept religious teachings, values, and practices, parents are stewards of their children's spiritual development. Parents, as stewards, fulfill their stewardship role in raising the next generation of believers to actively participate in church programs like Sunday school, youth groups, and community service projects.

The vitality and efficiency of the spiritual community are increased when parents are involved in the church. Parents give back to the community by actively participating in various ministries, chairing committees, and lending their unique abilities, insights, and energies to church programs. All members' spiritual experiences are enhanced, and

this active participation strengthens friendship ties within the church. Parents are essential in determining the path of the church as stewards of its mission and vision, guaranteeing its ongoing relevance and influence on people's lives and the community at large. Parents encourage others to accept their roles as active participants in the expected path of faith and service through their unwavering commitment to stewardship.

The concept of stewardship strongly emphasizes the prudent management and use of resources, such as money, time, and talent. Thus, parental participation underlines the importance of parents fostering their children's spiritual development and getting involved in the church community. Stewardship encourages parents to highlight their participation in church events and programs that support family unity and spiritual growth by seeing parenthood as a holy trust and an opportunity to serve. This synergy increases parental involvement and fosters a shared responsibility and mutual support culture inside the church, creating a lively and healthy community oriented toward faith and service.

By establishing a sense of purpose and shared duty among its members, stewardship cultivates a dynamic, thriving community built on faith and service. Parents who actively participate in church-based stewardship activities set an example for their children and the community by being generous, compassionate, and unselfish. People are encouraged to use their time, skills, and resources to benefit society, fostering a service culture.

Furthermore, stewardship fosters teamwork and cooperation as churchgoers collaborate to fund various ministries and outreach initiatives. Volunteer programs, fundraising events, and community service projects are stewardship-driven efforts that

unite people to meet the needs of the church community and the larger society. In addition to enhancing the ties of camaraderie, this group effort exemplifies the transformational potential of faith in action.

Generally, stewardship fosters a sense of fulfillment and belonging among its members by creating a concrete atmosphere where faith is lived out. People who actively engage in stewardship and service acts strengthen their bonds with their religious communities and feel gratified when they positively influence the world. This communal involvement ultimately facilitates the church's life and growth, allowing each member to grow spiritually and significantly while contributing to God's work.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the biblical foundations of stewardship and parents' responsibility to nurture their children's faith. I will also examine parents' specific roles in fostering spiritual growth and engagement within the church community. Additionally, I will explore how parents contribute to Christian educational programs, such as Sunday school, youth groups, and confirmation classes, and the impact of parents' involvement on the spiritual development of children. This paper will also discuss the challenges and opportunities parents face as they seek to balance family commitments with church responsibilities. Finally, I will discuss biblical stories and theological teachings to offer consolation, hope, and spiritual direction during difficult times. This topic explores how Christian parents handle conversations about faith, doubt, suffering, and resilience with their children.

Parents' Role in Nurturing Spiritual Growth

Several significant biblical texts and themes come to light while analyzing the biblical teachings on stewardship and the duty of parents to foster their children's faith. In scripture, biblical stewardship is the prudent administration and upkeep of the resources that God has entrusted to us (1 Corinthians 4:2; Matthew 25:14-30; and Luke 16:10-12). Tangible resources include relationships, time, skills, spiritual gifts, and abilities. Author Amy L. Sherman writes, "Our generous heavenly Father desires us to deploy our time, talents, and treasure to offer others foretastes of the coming kingdom."[2] Parents play a critical role in supporting their children's spiritual development by creating a loving environment that promotes inquiry, comprehension, and a sense of connection with their faith. Of his upbringing, Huston Smith wrote the following:

> I was born into a loving family whose parents committed their lives to the highest calling they could conceive — that of being missionaries to China. Sacrifices were to be expected, and (in the disease-ridden China of that time) they arrived on schedule; their firstborn died in their arms on his second Christmas Eve. . .. The most important thing I inherited from my parents was faith.[3]

The Bible often reminds parents to teach their children about God's laws and raise them virtuously. The necessity of transferring faith from one generation to the next is emphasized in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Likewise, in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, Moses instructs parents to impress God's commandments on their children. This passage emphasizes the importance of teaching God's Word diligently and consistently through formal

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[2] Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 45.

[3] Hutson Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), xiii.

instruction and daily interactions within the family. Marva L. Hoopes states, “We have seen that scripture is explicit in the call for adults to intentionally teach God’s Word to children. Parents and spiritual leaders are to take an active role in teaching children the truths of God, ensuring that the faith would be passed on to the next generations.”[4] Parents are commanded to educate their children on God’s rules carefully and to ingrain them in their minds.

Parents are responsible for setting an excellent example for their children by loving and serving God with all their words and deeds. Proverbs 20:7 states, “The righteous walk in integrity — happy are the children who follow them!” Also, Proverbs 22:6 encourages parents to raise their children properly, so they won’t stray from it as they age. Parents should set an example of faith and deference to divine directives. Because children mimic their parent’s behavior, parents who show they have a robust and continuous religion set a powerful example for their children to follow.

To establish discipline, parents are responsible for educating their children on values, boundaries, and the repercussions of their behavior. Also, parents need to nurture their children’s growth and assist them in overcoming life’s obstacles by offering direction and instruction. Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:4 cautioned parents to raise their children under the guidance and instruction of the Lord. This Ephesian text highlights the complementary functions of education and discipline in fostering children’s spiritual development. Children should lovingly receive discipline to help them comprehend God’s ways better.

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[4] Marva L Hoopes, *The Power of Story in the Spiritual Development of Children* (La Mirada, CA: Biola University, 2013), 216.

Parents must instill in their children the value of prayer to establish a relationship with a higher force and to encourage spiritual development. Acting as advocates, parents can also pray for their children's safety, protection, and direction when needed. Parents should pray for their children and intercede for them. According to Job 1:5, Job was a good man who frequently offered sacrifices and made pleas for his children. Through prayer, parents ask God for direction, protection, and blessings for their children, which is a very effective technique.

Parents are expected to lead by example in terms of faith and obedience to divine commands. Parents who demonstrate strong and consistent faith practices create a powerful example for their children because children often mimic their parents' conduct. The significance of transferring faith from one generation to the next is emphasized in Psalm 78:4-7. Parents must teach their children about God's honorable deeds so future generations will know them and can then tell their children about them.

Parents can bless and affirm their children by giving them words of support, affirmation, and blessing. Parents who praise their children's accomplishments and talents may provide them with confidence and a healthy self-image to serve them throughout their lives. By showing love and gratitude, parents may foster a nurturing atmosphere where their children feel appreciated and encouraged in their development and ambitions. In Genesis 27, Isaac bestows favors and words of inheritance on his sons Jacob and Esau. Parents today can also empower their children to accomplish God's intentions for their lives by speaking words of blessing and affirmation.

Parental responsibility in nurturing children's faith is multifaceted and foundational in family life. By teaching, modeling, disciplining, praying, passing on the

faith, and blessing their children, parents play a vital role in shaping their spiritual development and preparing them to walk in the ways of the Lord. Through these diverse actions, parents impart religious teachings and cultivate a deep understanding and personal connection to their faith within their children's hearts. Ultimately, this holistic approach fosters a solid spiritual foundation that guides children in navigating life's challenges with grace and conviction.

Parents' Role in Stewarding Engagement with Church Community

Parents' primary responsibility is encouraging their family's involvement in the church community. "We think of the church in terms of biblical metaphors. It is the body of Christ, the New Israel, and shepherd and flock. Speaking personally, we use the metaphors of warmth and relationship to describe the church — a community, a family, and a gathering of caring people."[5] A loving environment where children can flourish spiritually and form a strong feeling of belonging and commitment to the body of Christ can be fostered by parents by stewarding family participation in the church community. Parents provide opportunities for their children to investigate and participate in different facets of church life to help them develop a culture of active participation. Parents foster a lifetime relationship with the church community based on faith, friendship, and service through their deliberate stewardship of family engagement.

A strong spiritual life within the family must be fostered by prioritizing regular attendance at church services and events. Parents who regularly attend worship services

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[5] Peter L Steinke, *How Your 21st-Century Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations As Emotional Systems*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 1.

provide their children with strong examples of coming together as a community to worship God, get spiritual support, and spend time with other believers. Frequent attendance allows families to interact with the Bible, participate in corporate worship, and receive support and encouragement from the church community. Furthermore, families can strengthen their faith, develop enduring relationships, and advance as a unit in their discipleship together when they consistently participate in church-related activities. In the end, making consistent attendance a priority supports the importance of group worship and fortifies the family's ties to the body of Christ, encouraging spiritual development and harmony in the home.

Fostering spiritual development and a sense of family belonging requires encouraging participation in church activities and ministries. To effectively support and encourage their children's involvement in the church community, parents can play a critical role. "The default way to define engagement is participation in parts of the church program other than worship— most notably small group attendance, volunteerism, and giving. If a person is doing these things, they can be said to be engaged."[6] Encouraging children to participate in youth organizations, Sunday school classes, worship services, and volunteer opportunities are a few ways to do this. Parents establish a climate in which their children feel valued and empowered to actively engage in church activities by showing excitement for their children's involvement, offering support and encouragement, and creating opportunities for them to explore and contribute their gifts and talents. "The church should be a leeway where children can play and love themselves

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[6] Mancini Will and Cory Hartman, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 51.

in their engagement with God. It should be a secure refuge where children can feel comfortable of who they are and as God planned for them to be, with no pretensions or worries."[7] By giving their children this support, parents enable them to grow spiritually as engaged members of Christ's body, strengthen their bonds with other Christians, and link their children more deeply to their faith community.

Parents must model active involvement in church activities and missions to foster their children's spiritual development. In the book *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*, the author posits, "The children were present in Paul's churches, and they became members through baptism, probably baptized immediately after birth or with their families, however old they were, when their parents became members of Paul's churches."[8] Children pick up on their parent's behavior; therefore, they are more inclined to do the same when they witness parents actively participating in church activities. Parents actively engaged in church life show the value of faith and community involvement by participating in small groups, leadership roles, volunteering for service projects, and worship services. Parents create a powerful example for their children by emphasizing frequent attendance, dedication to assisting others, and developing relationships within the church community. These actions show their children what it means to live out their religion in accurate and relevant ways. Parents motivate their children to become active church community

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[7] Fazel E. Freeks, "A Fatherless South Africa: The Importance of Missional Parenting and the Role of the Church," *HTS Theological Studies* 78, no. 4. (2022): 7, doi:10.4102/hts.v78i4.7150.

[8] Shawn W. Flynn, ed., *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children,* 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), 109.

members by modeling active involvement and instilling a strong sense of belonging to the body of Christ.

Building a sense of unity and belonging among the church's members requires encouraging community engagement. Parents must encourage children to actively participate in community events, service projects, and fellowship activities. Parents provide an example for their children by prioritizing participation in church-sponsored events and outreach programs. They also show how important it is to develop relationships and serve others within the more prominent church family. By inviting friends and neighbors to church functions, taking part in Bible studies or small groups, and offering their time for community service, they can help others form connections. Parents foster an inviting and inclusive atmosphere where people of all ages can interact, support one another, and develop a stronger sense of faith and community by encouraging community engagement.

A key component of fostering spiritual growth in the family and the church community is offering direction and encouragement. To help their children traverse their spiritual path, parents are essential in providing them with guidance, support, and practical help. To achieve this, parents must carefully listen to their children's concerns, uncertainties, and life experiences while providing kind direction based on their faith and biblical values. In addition to praying for and with their children, parents can act as mentors and disciples by sharing their spiritual insights and creating opportunities for their children to grow in their understanding of God. Parents can also assist by encouraging their children, attending and participating in church events with them, and commemorating their victories and milestones along the way. By providing direction and

encouragement, parents enable their children to grow in their faith, face life's obstacles with courage and grace, and fulfill their destiny as followers of Christ inside and outside the church.

Challenges and Opportunities

Parents face opportunities as well as challenges when juggling church and family obligations. Parents may find it challenging to prioritize church attendance due to the competing demands of modern family life, which include employment, school, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments. "As mothers faithfully take their children to church to instill moral and Christian values, the effort dissipates before their eyes at a certain point. Particularly when the boys reach adolescence, and the compulsion to attend church fails. The influence of their environment outside the home is too great, and they ultimately abandon the church resulting in the possibility of an entire generation missing from the African American church."[9] In addition, the hectic pace of modern life can result in overwhelming and tired emotions, making it difficult for families to engage in spiritual activities intentionally. But amid these difficulties, there are also unique chances for development and friendship. Parents who skillfully and discerningly juggle these conflicting demands exemplify fidelity, resilience, and prioritizing values for their children. Parents can turn these obstacles into chances for greater connection, spiritual development, and enduring influence within and outside of the church by consciously

[9] Robert A. O'Neal, "The Black Church and the Current Generation: A Program to Address the Decline of African-American Church Attendance in Johnston County of North Carolina" (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2019), 10.

incorporating faith into daily life, promoting a culture of service and community, and encouraging open communication and spiritual growth within the family.

Parents may struggle to juggle their obligations with their families and religion, particularly in today's hectic and fast-paced world. There's rarely enough time or energy for active involvement in church events because of competing work schedules, school activities, extracurricular engagements, and domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, the ubiquitous social and technological influence can further splinter family time and remove opportunities for spiritual development and church-community interaction. Financial limitations may also prevent parents from making financial contributions to the church or taking part in pricey programs or retreats, which creates another obstacle to upholding a strong level of involvement with the church community.

In addition, parents who prioritize their family's spiritual health within the framework of their church commitments may face difficulties due to societal pressures and evolving cultural standards. Maintaining traditional religious beliefs and practices can be difficult, considering the secularization of society and the predominance of opposing ideologies, which can lead to conflict and uncertainty within families. Moreover, disagreements about how much a family member participates in church activities may occur, making it difficult to reach an understanding and consensus because of disparate priorities and preferences. Fostering a sense of accountability and belonging within the family's spiritual journey can be particularly difficult because of the hectic and individualistic nature of modern living, which can also cause feelings of isolation and alienation from the larger church community.

"Church leaders are often pulled in so many directions that they struggle to meet the demands on their own time, let alone help their congregations address their stewardship of time. Yet if the church is going to be relevant to its congregants, it must address this issue that is eating away at the spirits of too many religious individuals."[10] Those looking for harmony have options when they balance religion and family responsibilities. First, involvement in church activities frequently promotes a feeling of solidarity and community, giving families access to new networks of people with similar values and views. These relationships can provide essential resources like shared experiences that fortify familial ties, emotional support, and childcare aid. Participating in church-related activities, like volunteer projects or religious education courses, can also give families a chance to spend quality time together doing meaningful activities that strengthen their shared values and offer opportunities for spiritual development and introspection.

Balancing family responsibilities and religious commitments also allows people to develop critical life skills like prioritization, communication, and time management. Setting limits and preserving a healthy work-life balance can be learned by efficiently allocating time and resources between church and family obligations. Furthermore, having candid conversations with family members regarding the relevance of religious rituals promotes open communication and the growth of solid familial bonds built on respect and understanding. Ultimately, seizing the chance that comes with balancing

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[10] David E Gray, *Practicing Balance: How Congregations Can Support Harmony in Work and Life* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2012), 51.

responsibilities to the family and the church can result in deeper spiritual lives and closer family bonds.

Parental Guidance in Faith Formation During Challenging Times

When it comes to helping children face uncertainty, difficulty, and crisis through the prism of their Christian beliefs, parental guidance in faith development during difficult times is crucial. "It is well documented that children in the United States face a substantial chance of experiencing economic hardship, compared to children in most other developed countries."[11] Parents act as spiritual pillars during trying times, offering consolation, hope, and strength based on the promises of God's word during sickness, grief, or social upheaval. Parents reassure their children that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and dependable through prayer, scripture reading, and faith-related discussions, even in life's most trying situations.

Parents can also help their children develop their faith by showing genuine faith and perseverance in the face of hardship. Children gain essential lessons about endurance, tenacity, and the effectiveness of prayer as they watch their parents face difficulties with unwavering faith in God's love and provision. Parents encourage their children to hold fast to their faith and derive strength from their relationship with God by communicating personal accounts of God's faithfulness and narrating tales of biblical heroes who triumphed under challenging circumstances.

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[11] Hsien-Hen Lu, Julian Palmer, Younghwan Song, Mary Clare Lennon, and J. Lawrence Abner, "Children Facing Economic Hardships in the United States: Differentials and Changes in the 1990s," *Demographic Research* 10/11 (June 8, 2004): 289, https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol10/11/10-11.pdf.

Parents can help their children develop their faith during challenging times by assisting them in dealing with any questions, doubts, or difficulties that may arise from pain and uncertainty. Children can express their worries, battle theological problems, and seek explanations amid difficulty when their parents establish safe settings for open and honest communication. Parents assist their children in making sense of challenging circumstances by considering God's nature and promise through gentle advice and biblical wisdom, creating a deeper, more robust faith that withstands life's trials.

Parental help in forming faith during difficult times goes beyond simple comprehension to include real-world applications in everyday life. Even in the face of their struggles, parents inspire their children to demonstrate their faith by showing love, compassion, and service to those in need. Children learn how to live as followers of Christ and become messengers of hope and healing in a broken world by practicing kindness, generosity, and solidarity with those suffering. Parents provide their children the tools to face difficult situations with unshakeable faith, bravery, and compassion by modeling Christlike behavior and purposeful discipleship.

Apart from the abovementioned issues, it is imperative to emphasize the significance of community support and resources in providing parental assistance during difficult times. Families with Christian children frequently find comfort and strength in their church community, where they can get prayer, helpful advice, and emotional support from other believers. "We need strong communities where people belong, not just faith communities. We need strong local communities where we and our neighbors can flourish. When we engage our communities, we can strengthen them and improve the well-being of our neighbors. This engagement might include providing food, clothing, or

cash; mentoring or starting a business incubator; removing tattoos from former gang members; throwing a party for public school teachers; community organizing or lobbying at the state capital; or any number of actions."[12] By encouraging their children to seek support, prayer, and camaraderie from their church family during difficulties, parents may help their children develop a feeling of community and shared burdens within the body of Christ.

When faced with difficult circumstances, parental assistance in faith development may entail obtaining professional counseling or pastoral care as needed. Christian parents understand the value of talking to others about mental health issues, grieving, and getting advice from specialists or spiritual leaders who may help them through difficult emotional and spiritual situations. During difficult times, parents can enhance their efforts to strengthen their children's faith by utilizing resources like Christian books, devotionals, and online forums. With the help of these materials, you can get more understanding, inspiration, and valuable tips for incorporating your faith into daily life and overcoming hardship with hope and optimism.

Providing parental direction in faith development during trying times is a complex task that necessitates intentionality, genuineness, and dependence on God's mercy. Through fostering an environment based on prayer, scripture, and community, parents enable their children to weather life's storms with a strong sense of faith, fortitude, and God's unwavering presence and provision. Parents can provide an excellent example for their children by exhibiting a firm belief in God's omnipotence and a readiness to give up

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[12] Dana Horrell, *Engage!: Tools for Ministry in the Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 3.

their worries and fears in prayer. Parental guidance in fostering a resilient and faith-filled environment in the home lays the groundwork for their children to develop their relationship with God and to face life's challenges with courage and serenity. In the end, providing children with direction in their spiritual development during trying times is a potent act of love and discipleship that will mold their spiritual journey and prepare them for any obstacles that may arise.

There will come a time when suffering will be no more. For Christians going through difficult times, the assurance that suffering will end in paradise provides consolation and hope. Biblical teachings state that Christians will witness the total eradication of suffering in all its manifestations when they are united with God in the new heaven and new earth. The scene where God Himself comforts is described in Revelation 21:4, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." This scene represents the end of suffering, anguish, and grief. God's comforting gesture also demonstrates the return of joy and completeness when believers are free from sin and mortality.

Additionally, the absence of suffering in paradise denotes the accomplishment of God's purpose of redemption and the victory of His love over evil and death. Spiritual battle, emotional anguish, and bodily illnesses will all cease for believers in God's presence. Instead, they will experience the fullness of God's love and grace, enjoying eternal fellowship with Him and other believers while basking in the splendor of His presence. Christian confidence in the eventual triumph of good over evil and the

restoration of creation to its intended state of harmony and perfection is reaffirmed by the promise of no more suffering in heaven.

Conclusion

The study of biblical stewardship principles and the obligation of parents to foster their children's faith exposes the sacred calling on parents to assist their children in spiritually developing and participating in the church's life. We acknowledge parents' significant influence on their children's spiritual journey by looking at their specific roles in supporting spiritual growth, such as modeling faith, assisting participation in Christian educational programs, and participating in church events.

Through parental participation in church community programs such as youth clubs, Sunday school, and confirmation classes, children can enhance their comprehension of Christian doctrine and form significant relationships within the church community. These possibilities are priceless. The difficulties parents encounter in striking a balance between church and family obligations highlight the significance of deliberate prioritization and encouragement from church leaders and other believers.

Parental guidance in faith formation becomes even more critical during difficult times when parents must manage conversations with their children about faith, doubt, suffering, and resilience. Christian parents provide their children comfort, hope, and spiritual guidance by relying on biblical stories and theological teachings to establish a firm faith in God's faithfulness and provision.

Raising children in a faith-filled environment requires parental stewardship, a holy and fulfilling undertaking that presents obstacles and opportunities for spiritual

development and enrichment. The biblical mandate is fulfilled, and a permanent legacy of love, faith, and commitment to God is left within families and the larger church community when parents accept their responsibility as stewards of their children's faith.

Within the context of Legacy Pointe Church, parental engagement is understood and guided by biblical stewardship methodology. According to the Bible, God has entrusted us with resources and gifts, and stewardship handles them with care and diligence. Parenting and church attendance means acknowledging that children are priceless gifts from God and that parents are responsible for raising them according to biblical values and supporting their spiritual growth and community involvement.

Biblical stewardship stresses the value of purposeful investment in children's spiritual education within the context of parental engagement at Legacy Pointe Church. This entails actively participating in family- and children-focused church ministries and activities like youth clubs, family worship sessions, and Sunday school. It is recommended that parents set an example of discipleship and service to their children, showing them the importance of putting God and His kingdom first in all facets of life.

Furthermore, biblical stewardship mandates parents foster an environment of welcome, inclusivity, and charity inside the church. This entails opening their hearts and homes to welcome people into fellowship and discipleship and making monetary contributions to the church's outreach programs and ministries. Parents may create an atmosphere where families grow together in faith, love, and service by implementing stewardship concepts in their parenting and involvement with Legacy Pointe Church. This will leave a legacy of spiritual change and kingdom impact for future generations.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

According to the social capital theory, relationships and social networks have an intrinsic worth. Like physical assets, individuals and communities may use these relationships and social networks for mutual advantage. It highlights the significance of reciprocity, shared norms, and trust within social institutions, arguing that these components support collective activity and contribute to society's ability to function. In line with this theory, social capital can take on diverse forms, impacting economic, political, and cultural processes at different levels, such as those in families, communities, and more extensive societal networks. "The term is used differently depending on the field of study, for instance. In the literature of political science, sociology, and anthropology, social capital generally refers to the set of norms, networks, and organizations through which people gain access to power and resources that are instrumental in enabling decision-making and policy formulation."[1] Christopher Bruce says, "Social capital is defined in this dissertation as the relationships which are developed and nurtured through trust and reciprocity of knowledge and resources between individuals and groups, which develop, strengthen, and sustain shared purposes,

[1] Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin, *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2000), 45, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/663314681748693 02/Social-capital-a-multifaceted-perspective.

missions, and goals."[2] "The term is used differently depending on the field of study, for instance. In the literature of political science, sociology, and anthropology, social capital generally refers to the set of norms, networks, and organizations through which people gain access to power and resources that are instrumental in enabling decision-making and policy formulation."[3]

Fundamentally, Social Capital Theory emphasizes social networks' role in creating social cohesiveness, promoting collaboration, and spreading knowledge. It implies that networks with solid social links and high trust are more resilient and successful at overcoming obstacles and achieving shared objectives. "Social kinds are reproduced by the enformed activity of persons. The philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1989; 1998) has shown that the existence of social objects is established by their causal power and that this in turn is a result of the enformed activity of persons. That is, people are, so to speak, the moving parts of social kinds, but the activity of persons always occurs in some historically specific social arrangement."[4] In addition, the theory emphasizes how platforms for interaction and the development of a sense of shared identity and belonging among people are how institutions and organizations contribute to the development of social capital. Through a comprehensive grasp and application of social capital, communities, corporations, and politicians may advance social inclusion, economic

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[2] Christopher A. Bruce, Arts *Organizations and Social Capital: A Grounded Theory Approach to Understanding How Leveraging Social Capital Drives Organizational Success*, (PhD diss., The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2020), 22. https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/docview/2476167410.

[3] Tanzina Ferdous, "A Study On 'Social capital and relation with Good Governance'" (University of Dhaka), 5.

[4] Howard Engelskirchen, *Capital As a Social Kind: Definitions and Transformations in the Critique of Political Economy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 10.

growth, and the general well-being of society. In addition, the theory emphasizes how platforms for interaction and the development of a sense of shared identity and belonging among people are how institutions and organizations contribute to the development of social capital. Through a comprehensive grasp and application of social capital, communities, corporations, and politicians may advance social inclusion, economic growth, and the general well-being of society.

Social capital theory strongly emphasizes the role of relationships and social networks in enabling actions and results. In this context, we will investigate how parental engagement in the church influences youth's social capital and how this impacts youth attendance and participation. This theory offers a framework for examining how interpersonal relationships within the church environment shape youth involvement and conduct. Applying social capital theory will try to reveal how the relationships created between youth participants at Legacy Pointe Church and their parents help foster reciprocity, trust, and shared standards. This method provides insights into how social ties, community service, and youth involvement interact in the framework of the church.

The pressing issue facing Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, is the discernible drop in student participation and attendance after COVID-19. This problem emphasizes the importance of comprehending the variables affecting young people's involvement in the church. The use of social capital theory offers a structured approach to investigating the interpersonal dynamics and community ties that may be able to tackle this issue. Examining the relationship between 1 Samuel 1:24; 3:19–21 and social capital theory, particular attention is given to how important it is for parents to bring their kids to church for upbringing, development, and spiritual advancement. These verses emphasize

how crucial it is to create a welcoming atmosphere in the church where parents actively participate in advancing their kids' faith and involvement.

Furthermore, a closer look at Social Capital theory within the Progressive Era's Effect on Education framework emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in shaping student results. Studies show that students do better academically when parents or guardians actively participate in their children's education. This link emphasizes how social capital affects many facets of youth development on a larger scale. In addition, the relationship between stewardship and social capital theory emphasizes how parents must guide their children's development in all spheres of life, including social and spiritual growth. By fostering robust social ties within the church community, parents can create an atmosphere that supports their children's development and involvement.

In conclusion, this paper aims to shed light on the significance of parental involvement, community connections, and stewardship in fostering a vibrant and inclusive church environment for youth development and participation by applying Social Capital theory to the issue of declining youth attendance and engagement at Legacy Pointe Church. By examining these intersections, the study hopes to provide valuable tactics that Legacy Pointe Church and comparable communities might use to improve social relationships, increase parental involvement, and revive youth involvement after COVID-19. This analysis aims to further the current discourse on the revival of church youth ministries in the face of modern obstacles.

Understanding the Decline in Youth Attendance and Engagement at Legacy Pointe Church: A Social Capital Perspective

After the COVID-19 outbreak, Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, has faced a significant issue in the shape of a discernible drop in young attendance and involvement. This severe decrease requires careful investigation and calculated action rather than just being a statistical trend. Developing successful solutions requires understanding the underlying variables impacting young participation within the church community. In this analysis, we investigate how Social Capital theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the community ties and relationship dynamics relevant to this problem. According to social capital theory, a community's social networks, relationships, and shared standards are essential assets that people may use to further their common objectives and improve everyone's well-being. "Social capital is related to social resources creation in a social group to which individuals belong voluntarily. In a wider sense, those resources can emerge from the relationships that an individual establishes in groups to which he or she belongs voluntarily, by hazard, because of the necessity, or because of a process of social adscription. Social capital is, then, related to social networks and to norms established to improve the functioning of those networks."[5] By utilizing this theory within the framework of Legacy Pointe Church, we may explore the complex network of interpersonal relationships that influence adolescent involvement. We can learn more about why some young people stay involved in the

[5] Lynda R Elling, *Social Development* (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2009), 187, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10660428.

church while others leave by looking at the community's type and number of social connections.

The COVID-19 epidemic has caused disruptions to customary forms of communication and community involvement, creating difficulties in retaining young people's participation in religious events. We can better understand how these disturbances impact the resilience and strength of social connections inside the church by applying the ideas of social capital theory. Several factors could be behind reducing young people's attendance and involvement, including fewer in-person encounters, fewer opportunities for group worship, and restricted access to supportive networks. The theory of Social Capital highlights the significance of trust, reciprocity, and mutual norms in promoting communal unity and cooperative efforts. We can determine the church's ability to draw and keep young members by examining the prevalence of these factors within the congregation. For example, strong ties between church leaders, youth, and parents can spur youth in the community, even in the face of outside obstacles. "Relationship building is a critical component of engaging youth because it allows youth to develop trust with their caseworker—a process that takes time and adaptability. Establishing a strong foundation requires getting to know the young person fully, from their likes and dislikes to their hopes and ambitions for the future. Every conversation a caseworker has with a youth in care is a learning opportunity and being curious is essential."[6]

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[6] Children's Bureau, *Prioritizing Youth Voice: The Importance of Authentic Youth Engagement in Case Planning*, 6, https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo187853/youth-engagement.pdf.

According to social capital theory, social integration and inclusive practices are crucial to creating resilient communities. Fostering a feeling of community and belonging among young people at Legacy Pointe Church is essential for lessening the impact of the drop in involvement and attendance. This could entail implementing youth-focused programs, encouraging relationships between generations, and providing chances for group decision-making. The decrease in youth involvement and attendance at Legacy Pointe Church after COVID-19 emphasizes the necessity of a detailed comprehension of the underlying variables influencing youth involvement. The social capital theory's perspective effectively examines these dynamics, providing valuable insights into the community ties and relational networks that impact youth engagement. "Because every person is unique, a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement will not be successful, and what works best will vary depending on the youth."[7] Using this theoretical framework, Legacy Pointe Church may create focused plans to revive youth ministry and cultivate a vibrant, welcoming community for the next generations.

Building Social Capital: The Story of Hannah and Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:24:3:19-21

The narrative in 1 Samuel 1:24 about Hannah taking Samuel to the temple exemplifies social capital theory concepts, such as the value of social networks, reciprocity and trust, resource accessibility, community cohesion, and social mobility. Hannah is a prime example of how people can use their social networks to take advantage of opportunities, overcome obstacles, and improve the quality of life in their communities.

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[7] Children's Bureau, *Prioritizing Youth Voice:* 5.

The novel portrays Hannah as a lady who struggles with social stigma and infertility. “Hannah’s aloneness is in her experience of pain and hence her emotional experience: relationally or even publicly she is bound to the co-wife who provided the family’s children as surely as she is bound to the husband whose wife she is.”[8] Despite these challenges, she still has a sound support system, especially with her husband Elkanah and the priest Eli. According to social capital theory, social networks are crucial in offering resources and emotional support to those going through challenging circumstances. Hannah’s experiences with these people show how support and consolation can come from social bonds.

The social capital theory also emphasizes the need for reciprocity and trust in fostering relationships. Hannah trusts Eli when she gives him responsibility for Samuel’s training and care in the temple. Eli gives Hannah’s son his blessing and support in return for this show of trust. People and their relationships are strengthened when they reciprocate and share trust. Despite these challenges, she still has a sound support system, especially with her husband Elkanah and the priest Eli.

According to social capital theory, social networks are crucial in offering resources and emotional support to those going through challenging circumstances. Hannah’s experiences with these people show how support and consolation can come from social bonds. The social capital theory also emphasizes the need for reciprocity and trust in fostering relationships. Hannah trusts Eli when she gives him responsibility for Samuel’s training and care in the temple. Eli gives Hannah’s son his blessing and support

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[8] Keith Bodner and Benjamin J. M. Johnson, eds., *Characters and Characterization in the Book of Samuel,* 1st ed. (London, England: T&T Clark, 2019), 55, https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.5040/9780567680884.

in return for this show of trust. People's social capital increases, and their relationships are strengthened when they reciprocate and share trust.

Taking Samuel to the temple gives him spiritual development opportunities and religious instruction. In addition to keeping her promise, Hannah's choice to dedicate Samuel to God guarantees her son access to priceless opportunities and resources inside the religious community. Social capital places significant emphasis on the accessibility of resources, which robustly enable social networks and relationships. Hannah's commitment to Samuel to the temple strengthens the bonds within the religious community. People who participate in religious rituals and customs feel more like a part of the community and more like themselves. "The benefits emanating from these sacred structures were perceived as paramount. Within the temple precincts, all persons, items, and lawful proceedings were considered protected by the deity. This belief promoted a sense of stability and security within the community to serve as a place where both the individual worshipper and the reverent community could receive the deity's blessings. In this human-divine interaction, the community or its individual members offered worship through a combination of prayers and sacrificial rituals in the hopes of receiving divine favor, particularly in the granting of various petitions for protection from enemies, prayers for a bountiful harvest, and entreaties for forgiveness of sins. At the temple, heavenly powers were invoked to effect changes within the earthly realm that were deemed beyond human ability to enact."[9] Community members benefit from this sense of

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[9] Samuel E. Balentine, ed., "Tabernacles, Temples and Synagogues," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015) https://www-oxfordreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/display/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199858699.001.0001/acref-9780199858699-e-220?rskey=9kzeXp&result=218.

cohesion because it encourages mutual trust, cooperation, and support, which raises social capital overall. Members benefit from this sense of cohesion because it promotes mutual trust, cooperation, and support, which raises social capital overall.

Through her deeds, Hannah exhibits agency and the capacity to raise her social and economic standing. Giving Samuel up his life to serve God guarantees her son a high position in the religious hierarchy and possibly raises her family's social status.

According to social capital theory, social networks are crucial in promoting chances for growth and upward mobility. Hannah's tale of escorting Samuel to the temple in 1 Samuel 1:24 exhibits social capital theory's tenets, including the value of social networks, reciprocity and trust, resource accessibility, community cohesiveness, and social mobility. Hannah is a prime example of how people can use their social networks to take advantage of opportunities, overcome obstacles, and improve the quality of life in their communities.

The text, 1 Samuel 3:19-21, outlines Samuel's development as a prophet and his place in the Israelite community. Upon examining this passage via the framework of social capital theory, several noteworthy revelations become apparent. These passages portray Samuel as an able and trustworthy man whose words have weight. For Samuel to lead the people effectively, there must be faith in his prophetic powers. According to social capital theory, trust is crucial for establishing rapport and encouraging collaboration. Samuel's reputation for honesty and integrity strengthens his influence over the populace and increases his social capital. Samuel's network of ardent friends and adherents expands along with his stature as a prophet. His social circle has grown to include people around Israel who turn to him for direction and counsel. According to

social capital theory, people with large networks are better positioned to obtain resources, knowledge, and assistance. Samuel is skilled at creating networks, increasing his social capital, and broadening his influence. His ability to draw followers aligns with his ability to build networks.

Samuel's position as a prophet enhances the solidarity of the Israelite society. Through spiritual advice and direction, he facilitates the unification of individuals based on shared ideas and ideals. Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of collective norms and solidarity in promoting communal cohesiveness. Samuel's prophetic vocation strengthens these connections, fostering a feeling of inclusion and shared identity among the Israelites. Samuel is crucial in allocating societal resources and opportunities as a revered leader and prophet. He is an intermediary between God and the people, transmitting divine messages and instructions. Social capital theory highlights the significance of prominent persons in facilitating the distribution of resources and advancing social fairness. Samuel's capacity to champion the requirements of the individuals demonstrate his social influence and highlights his importance as a facilitator and influencer.

Samuel ascends from being a youthful apprentice in the temple to being a respected leader and judge of Israel through his prophetic vocation. His journey exemplifies the capacity for upward social mobility in ancient societies, when people might enhance their social standing through skills, charm, and intelligent connections. Social capital theory recognizes the significance of social relationships and reputation in promoting upward mobility. Samuel's achievement exemplifies the influential impact of social capital in changing personal paths and communal dynamics. 1 Samuel 3:19-21

demonstrates the relationship between social capital theory and Samuel's prophetic vocation, highlighting the convergence of trust, networking, community unity, resource allocation, and social advancement within the story. Samuel's narrative provides significant perspectives on the intricacies of leadership, influence, and societal transformation in ancient Israelite culture.

Building Social Capital Through Stewardship

Stewardship entails the conscientious administration and usage of resources for the advantage of people and subsequent generations. The social capital theory highlights the significance of networks and relationships in obtaining and utilizing resources. Stewards who foster robust social networks within their communities can efficiently deploy resources, including financial capital, human capital, and information, to meet communal demands and enhance social welfare. Stewardship depends on establishing trust and collaboration among individuals and groups to oversee and control shared resources and attain mutual objectives efficiently. "Stewardship is a more politically oriented way of rearranging how organizations are run. Stewardship requires an examination of power, purpose, wealth, and how those resources are allocated within the organization. Stewardship requires trust that those doing the work will be guided by the organizational moral mission, rather than needing to be coerced and controlled through hierarchal structures to do good work."[10] Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of trust, reciprocity, and cooperative norms in promoting joint endeavors

[10] Carrie Rogers, *Stewardship as Teacher Leadership Portraits from the Profession* (Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press, 2020), 19.

within communities. Stewards who prioritize the development of trust and cultivating positive connections among community members improve social capital, creating a favorable atmosphere for collective action, and the sustainable management of resources creates a favorable atmosphere for collective action and the sustainable management of resources.

Effective stewardship entails actively engaging with community people to grasp their needs, preferences, and goals comprehensively. The social capital theory highlights the significance of social ties and active involvement in community networks for creating social capital. Stewards who actively interact with a wide range of individuals and groups, attentively consider their viewpoints, and include them in decision-making contribute to developing social capital by fostering inclusiveness, transparency, and democratic governance in their communities. Efficient stewardship entails involving community people to comprehensively grasp their requirements, preferences, and goals. Social capital theory highlights the significance of social ties and engagement in community networks for creating social capital. Stewards who actively interact with a wide range of individuals and groups, attentively consider their viewpoints, and actively involve them in the decision-making process contribute to the development of social capital by fostering inclusiveness, transparency, and democratic governance in their communities.

Stewardship fosters the ability to effectively respond to and navigate new difficulties and uncertainties. Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of social networks in enabling the spread of knowledge, resolution of problems, and collective efforts in response to evolving situations. Stewards who develop strong social

connections enhance the ability of communities to withstand challenges by promoting unity, creativity, and collaborative approaches to solving problems. Stewardship is based on ethical concepts emphasizing integrity, accountability, and duty toward current and future generations. The social capital theory emphasizes the significance of ethical leadership in establishing and sustaining trust among communities. Stewards who exhibit integrity, openness, and impartiality in their dealings with others contribute to social capital by advocating for ethical principles and ideals that bolster social unity and overall welfare.

Stewardship and social capital theory both adhere to similar ideas of the management of resources, trust and collaboration, community involvement, the development of capabilities, resilience, and ethical leadership. "Stewardship, then, is an intention to distribute power widely, especially to those at the lowest levels of the organization. It calls us to organize workplaces based on relatedness and collaboration as an alternative to the bell-curve ideology of competitiveness that is used to rationalize patriarchy."[11] By incorporating these concepts, stewards can efficiently utilize social capital to advance sustainable development, strengthen community resilience, and cultivate inclusive and fair societies. By doing this, communities may fully use their social networks to tackle urgent problems and take advantage of possibilities for beneficial transformation. By prioritizing stewardship practices that emphasize collaboration and shared responsibility, individuals and organizations can foster a sense of community ownership and empowerment within their communities. In conclusion, the

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[11] Peter Block, *Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest*. 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013), 24.

combination of stewardship and social capital theory provides a robust framework for constructing more robust and resilient communities that flourish via trust, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

Building Social Capital: The Intersection of Progressive Education and Community Engagement

The educational movement of the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is closely connected to social capital theory, which highlights the importance of social networks and relationships in attaining personal and group objectives. Ann Dale and Jenny Onyx posit:

> "Social capital is about relationships — relationships within communities and between communities nationally and internationally through our global interconnectedness. We need to re-examine our relationships with the natural world (our environment) and with other species. One can 'have' a relationship or one can be 'in relationship' with another — a subtle but nonetheless critical difference. Our relationships are often based on dominance, seeing ourselves as 'apart' rather than being 'a part' of natural systems. And this perceived separation eliminates the personal from the professional, and means we have relationships rather than being in relationship."[12]

Progressive educators aimed to alter the education system by incorporating social capital principles into teaching techniques throughout this transformative period. Their objective was to promote cooperation, fairness, and active participation in schools, with the goal of nurturing a generation of socially aware individuals who can make significant positive changes in society. "Using these approaches to learning in the community, students can form social interactions needed to establish and build a community of learning for community health. They can create the notion of a community of learning in

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[12] Ann Dale and Jenny Onyx, *A Dynamic Balance: Social Capital and Sustainable Community Development* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2005), 17.

the absence of faculty involvement. Similarly, by using these learning frameworks, faculty can have a positive impact in shaping and extending the learning environment of students in the community."[13]

Progressive educators advocated for the significance of community engagement in education. According to social capital theory, strong community connections promote trust, cooperation, and reciprocity among individuals, resulting in improved results. Progressive educators aimed to cultivate social capital in communities by engaging parents, local organizations, and companies in school activities. The objective of progressive educators was to equip pupils with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in society and make well-informed decisions actively. Social capital theory supports this objective by proposing that robust social connections and shared values make active participation in community affairs easier. Progressive educators aim to foster social capital by encouraging collaboration, problem-solving, and democratic principles within schools, and they aim to apply these skills and values in broader society.

Progressive educators fought for the implementation of education systems that are characterized by inclusivity and equity. Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of bridging social capital, which pertains to the relationships between persons from different origins. Progressive educators sought to cultivate cross-cultural relationships among pupils of other races, classes, and nationalities to create bridging social capital, which may effectively diminish prejudice and foster social cohesiveness. Progressive education prioritized practical, experienced learning and the cultivation of interpersonal

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[13] Francis Sarr, *Education for Community: Health Building a Community of Learning for the 21st Century*, 1st ed. (Oxford, UK: Cenmedra, 2017), 1948.

abilities. According to social capital theory, these experiences can improve social capital by reinforcing interpersonal relationships and promoting collaboration. Progressive educators aimed to cultivate the social aptitudes and connections necessary for achievement in adulthood by offering students chances to collaborate on projects, partake in cooperative learning, and engage in community service.

Progressive educators regarded schools as institutions for academic instruction and community centers that might function as central points for social interaction and assistance. Social capital theory reinforces this viewpoint by emphasizing the function of institutions in enabling social ties and reciprocal aid. Progressive educators sought to enhance the cohesion of local communities and foster communal well-being by allowing community activities in schools, establishing adult education programs, and providing social services. Progressive educators developed new techniques to expand the influence of schools beyond their conventional pedagogical boundaries, acknowledging their crucial function as community anchors. Their objective for schools was to create dynamic environments that fostered intergenerational learning, cultural interchange, and community empowerment. By adopting this comprehensive approach, progressive educators aimed to promote academic success and a sense of belonging and resilience within the broader social environment.

Essentially, the Progressive Era educational movement and social capital theory were intimately linked because they both highlighted the significance of social connections, community involvement, and civic engagement in advancing education and society. The progressive educators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized community engagement, fairness, and hands-on learning, reflecting social

capital theory principles. They aimed to develop social capital that might drive good change beyond the classroom by promoting inclusive environments civic education and presenting schools as community centers. The convergence of educational reform and social capital theory established the basis for contemporary educational approaches that acknowledge the crucial influence of social ties for both personal achievement and societal advancement.

Conclusion

Ultimately, comprehending social capital theory can enhance the incorporation of a family pledge initiative, highlighting the significance of parents and guardians accompanying their children to religious services. Social capital, which encompasses the connections, networks, and trust among individuals in a community, is essential for promoting collective action and shared accountability. By examining the biblical accounts in 1 Samuel 1:24 and 3:19-21, we may identify similarities between the idea of social capital with Hannah taking her son Samuel to the temple to fulfill her promise and Samuel's subsequent development of positive relationships with God and others. This narrative demonstrates the significance of family dedication to religious observance and its beneficial influence on personal and collective welfare, highlighting the function of social capital in cultivating spiritual and social bonds within religious communities.

Moreover, social capital is intricately connected to stewardship, as effective management and preservation of resources frequently depend on robust social connections and collaboration among individuals within a community. The Family Pledge Initiative promotes a culture of stewardship and mutual support within the

congregation by encouraging families to participate in church activities together, fostering a sense of communal duty and ownership. The Family Pledge Initiative aligns with the ideas of inclusive learning environments and collaborative partnerships within progressive education and community engagement. Progressive educators acknowledge social ties' importance in fostering student achievement and societal advancement. By incorporating the project into educational practices and community outreach initiatives, educators can utilize social connections to empower families as engaged participants in their children's spiritual and academic growth.

Furthermore, the Family Pledge Initiative project catalyzes intergenerational bonds, effectively bridging the divide between parents, children, and elders within the congregation. By actively engaging in church events, families enhance their connections and the overall social cohesiveness and liveliness of the church community. Ultimately, by promoting a culture of reciprocal assistance and shared accountability, the project can enable families to become catalysts for constructive transformation within the church and the broader society.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

As I considered how my mother and grandmother carefully created the groundwork for my religious and spiritual journey and my work at Legacy Pointe Church, I easily see a natural convergence of the impact of parental involvement and how it positively affects young people growing up in the church. When I was growing up in the church provided a loving embrace and created a setting where spiritual principles were valued above all else. My subjective experiences, along with my dedication to helping youth develop spiritually, are ripe for creating a viable youth ministry that would provide a safe and sacred space for young people to develop as followers of Christ.

Likewise, as I analyzed my current context, my observations, along with qualitative evidence indicate that the youth ministry has not rebounded from the church's shutdown due to Covid-19. It wanted to explore what happens in a youth ministry when parents are fully involved as co-laborers with youth leaders. I sought to delve into issues such as the parental engagement impact on the spiritual growth of their children and what happens when parents are not actively involved.

My life's mission was shaped in large part because of my family's unwavering dedication to my spiritual development. I can now see how my mother and grandmother spurred my spiritual journey. I see how these women sowed the seeds that grew into a

deep awareness of the family's role in a person's spiritual journey. Their advice has given me a sense of purpose that has motivated me to research and promote the importance of parental involvement in religious communities. Motivated by the powerful example my mother and grandmother set for me in guiding my own spiritual journey within the hallowed walls of the church, I hoped to explore the complex dynamics of parental engagement in supporting the spiritual growth of the next generation through my doctoral dissertation.

Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, is facing a challenge since our middle and high school students have not been showing up or participating as much since COVID-19. Our youth are forced to attend school regardless of their own desire to do so. Parents and guardians are aware of their responsibilities to ensure their children attend school and all mandated extracurricular activities practices and/or rehearsals. Nevertheless, it seems students in middle school and high school have a choice whether to attend church. Through this project, I contend that parents and guardians will demonstrate an increased commitment to ensuring their children's attendance and engagement with Legacy Pointe church if parents and guardians participated in a six-week Family Pledge Initiative.

In my opinion, students' attendance and involvement at Legacy Pointe Church will increase if the youth leaders hold parents and guardians responsible through weekly meetings and ministry opportunities. Opportunities for youth to participate in ministry provide parents and guardians an ongoing reminder that they are responsible for their children's spiritual development. Holding guardians and parents responsible for bringing their children to church is my goal. Educating the youth on the value of visiting God's

house is the ultimate objective. I want the young people to replicate this pattern with their children. I personally understand the significance and importance of parents bringing their children to church. My beliefs are based on the fact my mother and grandmother did not give me a choice to attend and participate. Not only am I a Christian, I am a preacher because of them. I want to provide young people a chance to get involved and deepen their connection with Christ through worship of the arts ministries and youth bible studies.

The idea that parents and guardians are responsible for molding the spiritual and moral development of their children is firmly grounded in both biblical teachings and historical circumstances. The need to bring children to the church for their education, maturation, and spiritual advancement is underscored by biblical passages throughout scripture. The passages, 1 Samuel 1:24 and 1 Samuel 3:19-21, emphasize the responsibility of parents and guardians to create a nurturing atmosphere for their children, where they can cultivate their faith and establish a personal connection with God. Historically, The Progressive Era had a significant influence on education, namely by highlighting the significance of parental involvement. Research during this period demonstrated that children whose parents or guardians actively participated in their secular education achieved higher academic performance, compared to those with less involved households. This historical perspective emphasizes the crucial significance of parental engagement, not just in children's academic achievement, but also in their holistic growth as conscientious and ethical humans.

From a theological perspective, stewardship refers to the responsibility we have to manage not only our financial resources, but also all the blessings, including our children.

Parents and guardians have the responsibility to lead and support their children's spiritual development, impart moral principles, and foster a feeling of belonging and dedication to the community. This stewardship entails setting a positive example, creating an atmosphere that encourages children to sustain their religious beliefs, and providing them with support as they strive to develop a profound and significant connection with God. The significance of community and trust inside the church is further emphasized by interdisciplinary perspectives, such as Social Capital Theory. This approach focuses on fostering networks, trust, and a sense of belonging among church members.

The implementation of a Family Pledge Initiative emphasized to parents and guardians the significance of their children being connected to a local church. Through the act of pledging to assist one other and actively engaging in church events, families can fortify social connections, amplify involvement, and improve the general welfare of the church community. Incorporating these foundational perspectives—biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary—into a Family Pledge Initiative offered a comprehensive approach to fostering parental accountability and youth engagement within the church, ensuring that children are nurtured in a supportive and spiritually enriching environment.

Methodology

The Family Pledge Initiative was established to evaluate the effects of parental guidance and youth participation in the church. A multi-method approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the initiative's efficacy. The principal methodologies encompassed pre- and post-surveys, pledge cards, interviews,

and group discussions. These instruments offered insights on parental dedication, behavioral modifications, and the overall efficacy of the effort in promoting a culture of faith-based accountability.

Pre- and Post-Assessment Surveys:

To measure the hypothesis, the qualitative analysis method was used. To collect data, each participant received pre- and post-project surveys (See Appendix X). The surveys were employed to assess the following alterations in attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of parental stewardship prior to and following the project.

The evaluations examined the following baseline commitment levels:

- Frequency for which parents attended church with their children prior to the initiative.
- Parental perspectives on faith-based involvement.
- Parental comprehension of stewardship and accountability.
- Levels of youth participation.
- The extent of children's active involvement in church activities.
- Obstacles to church participation by recognizing difficulties parents encounter in taking their children to church.
- Alterations in family religious practices. An increase in prayer regularity, faith-related discussions, and church participation.

Survey Development

The surveys included a combination of closed ended (Likert scale) questions and

open-ended reflections to obtain both quantitative data and subjective insights. Illustrations of survey inquiries encompassed:

- On a scale of “weekly, biweekly, monthly, occasionally, and rare/never,” how frequently do you attend church with your child(ren)?
- Prior to the initiative, what were the primary obstacles in maintaining your family's involvement in church activities?
- What alterations, if any, have you noted in your child's disposition towards church involvement? (Post-survey).

Data Examination Quantitative data from Likert-scale responses were examined to discern trends in engagement. Qualitative data from open-ended replies were classified into themes, including "increased accountability, barriers to engagement, and spiritual growth. Through the comparison of pre- and post-survey findings, the initiative effectively evidenced quantifiable enhancement in parental engagement and youth involvement.

Pledge Cards: Encouraging Commitment and Tracking Accountability

Pledge cards served as a tangible commitment tool, encouraging parents to publicly affirm their dedication to bringing their children to church and fostering faith-based discussions at home. At the beginning of the initiative, each parent received a pledge card outlining key commitments, such as bringing their child(ren) to church consistently for the next six weeks. Engaging in at least one faith-based conversation at home each week. Encouraging their child’s participation in church activities. Parents

signed their pledge cards as a personal and spiritual commitment, reinforcing their role in their child's faith journey.

Data Collection and Follow-Up

Pledge cards were collected and reviewed to analyze trends in commitment levels. Parents were encouraged to reflect on their pledges during group discussions and post-surveys to assess whether they were able to fulfill their commitments. This method provided self-reported accountability data, helping measure the effectiveness of the initiative in promoting long-term behavior change. Pledge cards were an essential tool in reinforcing parental responsibility while also serving as a motivational reminder of their spiritual leadership.

Interviews: Gaining In-Depth Perspectives

The purpose of the interviews was to gain deeper insights into the personal experiences, challenges, and successes of the initiative. One-on-one interviews were conducted with a select group of parents. These interviews allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how the initiative impacted families beyond what could be captured in surveys.

Following is the interview process:

- A semi-structured format was used, combining pre-set questions with flexibility for open-ended discussion.
- Interviews lasted between 10 and 15 minutes, allowing parents to share their experiences in a comfortable, conversational setting.

- Participants were selected based on survey responses, ensuring diversity in perspectives (e.g., parents who faced challenges vs. those who saw immediate success).

The interviews focused on the following key themes:

- Personal faith journey: How the initiative influenced the parent's own faith practices.
- Challenges and barriers: Struggles in maintaining church attendance and faith conversations at home.
- Child's response: observed changes in their child's attitude and engagement.
- Suggestions for improvement: Feedback on how the initiative could better support families.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed, and responses were categorized into common themes, such as greater awareness of my role as a spiritual leader. My child became more excited about going to church. By incorporating interviews, the initiative was able to capture personal stories and testimonies that added depth to the numerical survey data.

Group Discussions: Fostering Community and Shared Learning

Group discussions were an essential component of the initiative, providing parents with a space to share experiences, ask questions, and support one another in their journey of spiritual stewardship. These discussions also served as an indirect method of data collection, revealing common themes, challenges, and successes among participants.

Discussion Format

Each session began with a guided discussion question related to that week's theme. Parents were encouraged to share real-life applications and reflect on how they were implementing their pledge commitments. The facilitators took notes on key discussion points, identifying recurring challenges, motivations, and behavioral shifts.

Data Collection from Discussions

Themes were recorded and analyzed to identify shared experiences across multiple parents. Facilitators noted direct quotes and impactful stories that highlighted the initiative's influence. Discussions provided real-time feedback, allowing for adjustments to the initiative as needed. Through group discussions, parents built a sense of community and accountability, reinforcing the initiative's goal of sustained parental engagement in faith-based stewardship.

The Family Pledge Initiative utilized a multi-method data collection approach to measure the impact of parental stewardship on youth engagement in church. By combining pre- and post-surveys, pledge cards, interviews, and group discussions, the initiative was able to do the following:

- quantify changes in parental commitment (through surveys).
- Encourage accountability and commitment (through pledge cards).
- Capture in-depth personal experiences (through interviews).
- Foster a supportive learning environment (through group discussions).

This comprehensive methodology ensured that the data collected was both measurable and meaningful, allowing for a well-rounded understanding of how parental involvement influences youth church engagement. By integrating quantitative assessments and qualitative insights, the initiative was able to track real-life transformations and provide valuable insights for future faith-based programs.

Implementation

The Family Pledge Initiative at Legacy Pointe Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, is a six-week, one-hour program to foster deeper family engagement in church life. The program was 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, January 25 through March 15, 2025 EST. One of the unexpected challenges in implementing the Family Pledge Initiative was the impact of severe winter weather. Several sessions were postponed due to snow and frigid temperatures, which affected both attendance and the overall timeline of the initiative. The delays created gaps between sessions, requiring flexibility in rescheduling and participant engagement. Parents who had committed to attending each session sometimes found it difficult to travel due to hazardous road conditions. The momentum built in the early weeks was disrupted, requiring extra effort to re-engage participants after each delay. Some participants faced additional scheduling conflicts when sessions were rescheduled, leading to a slight decrease in overall attendance. To address these challenges, I maintained consistent communication with participants, sending reminders and encouragement through text messages, phone calls, and church announcements. I

also ensured that each rescheduled session remained accessible, choosing dates and times that worked for as many participants as possible.

At the start of the initiative, 11 parents committed to participating. However, as the weeks progressed, scheduling conflicts and personal obligations caused three participants to drop out. By the end of the initiative, eight parents remained actively engaged and completed the program. Of the number of families, there were five two-parent households and three single-parent households. Their dedication was reflected in consistent attendance despite rescheduled dates, active engagement in discussions, surveys, and interviews and personal testimonies about the impact of the initiative on their faith and family life.

Although the number of participants decreased, the core group that remained provided valuable, in-depth insights. Their commitment ensured that the data collected was rich, reflective, and representative of those who fully engaged with the initiative. The adjustments made due to weather and scheduling conflicts did not diminish the quality of the program's outcomes but instead highlighted the resilience and dedication of those who saw it through. By adapting to unexpected circumstances and focusing on those who remained engaged, the initiative was still able to achieve its goals and provide meaningful data on parental stewardship and youth church engagement.

This initiative is designed to encourage families to intentionally commit to grow together in faith and become more actively involved in their church community. I used the project's biblical, historical, theological, and social foundations each week to collectively guide participants in making and maintaining these commitments.

As previously mentioned, six sessions were held. Following is the schedule for each of the six weeks:

Week 1: Introduction and Orientation

The program began with an introductory session that set the tone for the entire initiative. This session started with a prayer, a warm welcome, and an overview of the Family Pledge Initiative. The purpose of this initiative was clearly articulated. The goal was to inspire families to make deliberate commitments to enhance their spiritual growth and active participation in church life. This session included an icebreaker activity, where families were prompted to reflect on their current level of church involvement and spiritual practices at home. This reflection was guided by questions such as, “What are some ways your family currently engages in church life? How do you support each other’s spiritual growth at home?” This activity helped families recognize areas where they might already be strong and others where they might want to grow.

Following this reflection, the session delved into a detailed explanation of the Family Pledge Initiative. The goals and importance of making family commitments were discussed, emphasizing how the pledges can serve as a framework for families to be intentional about their spiritual practices and involvement in the church community. I provided examples of potential pledges, including committing to regular family prayer time, attending church services together weekly, or volunteering for a church ministry as a family. Participants were encouraged to consider what specific commitments would be meaningful and feasible for their families. The highlight of this session was the Family Pledge Creation Workshop, where families brainstorm and wrote

down their personalized pledges. The categories of pledges included faith practices, church involvement, community service, and mutual support.

Following the session, families discussed practical steps to ensure they followed through on their pledges. Such steps included setting reminders, scheduling family check-ins, or pairing up with another family for mutual accountability. The session closed with a prayer and blessing, reinforcing that those commitments are not just personal goals but spiritual ones that rely on God's guidance.

Week 2: Biblical Foundations - 1 Samuel 1:24; 3:19-21 (NRSV)

The second week focused on the Family Pledge Initiative's biblical foundations, using Samuel's story as a critical example. The session began with an opening prayer and a brief introduction to the selected scripture passages from 1 Samuel 1:24 and 3:19-21. The first passage discusses Hannah dedicating Samuel to the Lord, which serves as a powerful example of faith and stewardship. Participants explored the context of this verse, focusing on the significance of dedicating something precious to God and the implications of such a commitment in their own lives. The second passage highlights Samuel's growth and development as a prophet, emphasizing the role of parental dedication and God's faithfulness in guiding a child's spiritual journey.

This session was designed to help families reflect on how these biblical principles can be applied, particularly in their roles as parents and community members. The discussion was guided by questions such as, "What does Hannah's act of dedicating Samuel to God teach us about faith and stewardship?" and "How did Samuel's early life and God's presence in his life impact his future role as a prophet?" Participants were

encouraged to consider how their relationship with God during their youth has shaped their spiritual journey and how they can support the spiritual development of their children in similar ways. The session also included a reflection period, where participants silently considered how the lessons from these passages can apply to their family dynamics and their role within the church community. This reflection was followed by group sharing, where participants were invited to discuss any insights or commitments, they have made due to the discussion. The session concluded with closing remarks summarizing the key points discussed and a prayer reinforcing the spiritual insights gained.

Week 3: Historical Foundation - Progressive Era Impact on Educational Movement

During Week 3, I shifted the focus to the initiative's historical foundations by examining the impact of the Progressive Era on educational movements, particularly its emphasis on child-centered learning, experiential education, and active participation. The session began with a prayer and an icebreaker activity where participants shared impactful learning experiences from their childhood. This activity was designed to help participants connect with the session's theme by recalling when hands-on or interactive learning made a lasting impression on them.

Following the icebreaker, the session provided a historical overview of the Progressive Era Educational Movement and explained how its principles can be applied to youth engagement in church activities. The discussion highlighted The Progressive Era education's core principles, which emphasized experiential learning, critical thinking, and active participation. The session explored how those principles can inform the

church programs' designs that are relevant and engaging for youth. Participants were encouraged to think about how these educational strategies can be used to make faith more accessible and meaningful for young people.

In the second half of this session, participants were divided into small groups and tasked with designing a church activity or program that incorporates those Progressive Era principles. Each group presented ideas to the larger group, and the session concluded with a reflection on how to implement those ideas in both home and church settings. Participants were encouraged to commit to trying at least one new approach in that coming week, making faith a more hands-on and relevant experience for their children. The session ended with a prayer, asking for God's guidance in integrating those educational principles into their family and church life.

Week 4: Theological Foundation – Stewardship

The fourth week focused on the theological foundation of stewardship, emphasizing parents' responsibility as stewards of their children's spiritual growth. The session began with a prayer and an icebreaker that prompted participants to share experiences where they felt a strong sense of responsibility for their child's spiritual or moral development. This led to a discussion on what it means to steward their child's faith and how that role plays out in daily life.

The theological exploration of stewardship began with a discussion of stewardship from a biblical perspective, using theological sources to support the conversation. Participants learned that stewardship involves recognizing that children are a gift from God and that parents are entrusted with their care and spiritual formation. This

responsibility includes guiding children in faith, modeling Christian values, and leading them toward a relationship with God. The discussion is enriched with questions such as, "How does the idea of stewardship change the way you approach parenting?" and "What theological insights have shaped your understanding of your role as a parent?"

The session also included a group reflection where participants shared how their faith influences their parental approach and their challenges in fulfilling their role as stewards. This was followed by a practical application segment, where participants brainstormed ways to live out the concept of stewardship in their daily lives. Ideas discussed included regular family devotions, prayer, Bible study, involving children in church activities, teaching Christian values, and leading by example in showing love, compassion, and integrity. Participants were encouraged to identify specific actions they can take to better fulfill their stewardship roles and commit to consistently implementing these practices. The session concluded with a commitment exercise, where participants pledged to a stewardship practice they will implement in the coming week, followed by a prayer asking for God's wisdom and strength in fulfilling this responsibility.

Week 5: Interdisciplinary Foundation - Social Capital Theory

In Week 5, the focus shifted to an interdisciplinary foundation, introducing Social Capital Theory and its relevance to parental engagement and youth involvement in church. The session began with a prayer and an icebreaker where participants shared stories about how strong community networks or relationships have positively impacted their family or church involvement. This activity set the stage for a discussion on the concept of social capital and its importance in building a solid church community.

The session provided an overview of Social Capital Theory, explaining its key components: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the relationships within a close-knit group, such as families or church members. Bridging social capital involves connections that bring together people from different groups or backgrounds, while linking social capital refers to relationships between individuals or groups and institutions, such as churches or schools. The discussion explored how these types of social capital contribute to building strong community networks and enhancing parental and youth engagement in church. Participants reflected on the presence of social capital in their church community and discussed strategies for strengthening these relationships. Questions such as, "How do strong relationships within the church benefit your family?" and "What strategies can we use to strengthen bonding social capital within our church families?" guided the discussion.

The session also included a group brainstorming activity where participants identified practical ways to build and strengthen social capital within their church, particularly enhancing parental and youth involvement. The session concluded with a reflection on how building social capital can impact their family and the broader church community, followed by a prayer asking for God's guidance in fostering these relationships.

Week 6: Review and Resources - Pledge Commitment

The final week of the Family Pledge Initiative was dedicated to reviewing the program, sharing resources, and making final pledge commitments. The session began with a prayer and an introduction emphasizing the importance of equipping parents with

the resources and tools they need to build social capital within the church community. Participants received resource packets that include overviews of Social Capital Theory, the Progressive Era educational movement, case studies of successful church programs, and biblical lessons from 1 Samuel 1:24 and 3:19-21. These resources were intended to reinforce the lessons learned throughout the initiative and provide practical strategies for continued growth.

I then asked participants to complete surveys and questionnaires to assess their current engagement level and perceptions of social capital within the church. These surveys also gathered feedback on the initiative's effectiveness and suggestions for improving community bonds and increasing youth involvement. After completing the surveys, participants engaged in small-group interviews to discuss their experiences, challenges, and ideas for strengthening community connections. Each group shared a critical insight or idea with the larger group, fostering a collaborative environment where participants could learn from each other's experiences.

The session concluded with the distribution of pledge commitment cards, where participants were encouraged to write down specific actions they would take to build social capital and engage their children in church activities. These pledges were intended to serve as a reminder of the commitments made during the initiative and as a guide for continued spiritual growth and community involvement. The session ended with words of encouragement, emphasizing the collective impact of small individual actions in building a strong church community, and a closing prayer asking for guidance, strength, and community growth as participants worked to fulfill their commitments.

In summary, the Family Pledge Initiative at Legacy Pointe Church was holistic

program designed to empower families to grow together in faith, actively participate in church life and strengthen their relationships within the church community. Through structured sessions combining biblical teachings, historical insights, theological reflections, and practical applications, the initiative provided families with the tools and support they needed to make meaningful and lasting commitments to their spiritual and communal growth. Each week built upon the previous one, creating a cohesive and comprehensive approach to family and church life grounded in faith, supported by community, and enriched by thoughtful reflection and action.

Summary of Learning

Reflections on Week 1: The Role of Faith in Youth Development

Week 1 of the Family Pledge Initiative focused on The Role of Faith in Youth Development, guided by Proverbs 22:6 (NRSV): "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." The goal was to help parents and guardians recognize how faith shapes their children's development and equip them with strategies to nurture spiritual growth. This first session set the foundation for our discussions by emphasizing intentional faith-building within the family unit. Throughout the session, both the participants and I gained valuable insights about the impact of faith on children's moral, emotional, and social development.

Key Takeaways from Week 1

Faith as a Moral Compass

One of the most significant lessons we learned was that faith provides a moral foundation for children. Many parents shared personal experiences of how biblical principles guide their parenting decisions and help their children distinguish right from wrong. We discussed how teaching children faith-based values, such as kindness, honesty, and forgiveness, equips them to navigate life's challenges with integrity. Participants acknowledged that, in today's world, where children are often influenced by conflicting messages from media and peers, a strong spiritual foundation is essential. During our discussion, a few parents admitted that they had not previously thought about how they integrate faith into daily life beyond church attendance. This realization led to a conversation about practical ways to model faith at home, such as praying together, discussing Bible stories, and encouraging children to practice gratitude and empathy.

The Role of Parents in Spiritual Nurturing

A major insight from the session was the understanding that children's faith development is significantly influenced by their parents' own spiritual engagement. Many participants recognized that while they desire their children to grow in faith, they must first model a consistent faith journey themselves. As one parent put it, "If my child sees me prioritizing prayer and trusting God in difficult times, they will learn to do the same." This realization encouraged parents to be more intentional about creating a faith-filled home environment. Some committed to establishing regular family devotions,

while others planned to be more open about sharing their personal faith experiences with their children. The group also discussed the importance of attending church as a family, not just for spiritual nourishment but also for strengthening a child's sense of belonging within the faith community.

Faith's Role in Emotional and Social Development

Another key discussion point was how faith positively impacts a child's emotional and social development. Several participants shared stories of how their children turned to prayer or scripture in times of fear or uncertainty, demonstrating that faith provides emotional resilience. We also explored how church involvement helps children develop a sense of community, teaching them to build relationships based on love, respect, and service. Parents discussed how faith-filled friendships and mentorship within the church can reinforce positive values. One guardian noted that their child looks up to a youth leader, seeing them as a role model for living out their faith. This sparked a discussion on the importance of surrounding children with faith-centered influences, both at home and in the church community.

Personal Reflections

As the facilitator, I found Week 1 to be an eye-opening experience. I realized that while many parents desire to instill faith in their children. However, they sometimes feel unsure about how to do so effectively. The discussion helped me appreciate the importance of providing parents with practical tools and encouragement in this journey. I also observed how sharing personal experiences helped build trust among participants,

making the conversation more meaningful and relatable. One of my key takeaways was the significance of consistency in faith-building. Children learn best through repetition and lived examples, meaning that parents' daily actions and words matter greatly. This reinforced my belief that the Family Pledge Initiative can be a powerful tool in helping families commit to raising faith-driven children with intention and purpose.

Week 1 of the Family Pledge Initiative was a valuable time of reflection and growth for both the participants and me. Through Proverbs 22:6, we gained a deeper understanding of how faith influences youth development and how parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's spiritual foundation. The discussions encouraged parents to be more intentional in modeling faith at home, incorporating spiritual practices into everyday life, and fostering a faith-centered community for their children. Moving forward, these insights served as a guiding force in the remaining weeks of the initiative, ensuring that faith remains a cornerstone of youth development in our church community.

Reflections on Week 2: Building Social Capital Through Church Involvement

In Week 2 of the Family Pledge Initiative, we explored the theme Building Social Capital Through Church Involvement, with Hebrews 10:24-25 (NRSV) as our guiding scripture: "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." The objective was to help participants understand social capital and how relationships built within the church strengthen individuals and the community. Through discussion and reflection, we examined how consistent church involvement fosters connection, support, and shared spiritual growth.

Key Takeaways from Week 2

Understanding Social Capital in the Church Context

For many participants, the concept of social capital was new. We discussed how social capital refers to the benefits people receive from relationships within a community—such as support, encouragement, and access to resources. In a church setting, this means having a network of people who uplift one another spiritually, emotionally, and even practically in times of need. Several parents reflected on how their church relationships had personally impacted them, from receiving prayers during hardships to finding mentors for their children. One participant shared that when they first joined the church, they felt isolated, but over time, through involvement in small groups and ministries, they formed meaningful connections that strengthened their faith. This conversation reinforced the idea that church is not just a place of worship but a community that nurtures and sustains its members.

The Power of Consistent Church Involvement

The discussion also highlighted the importance of regular participation in church activities. Participants acknowledged that occasional attendance does not provide the same level of support and connection as active involvement. We examined Hebrews 10:24-25 and how it calls believers to not only gather but to encourage one another and spur each other toward love and good deeds. Many parents realized that their level of church involvement directly impacts their children's engagement. If parents are active,

children are more likely to form friendships and develop a sense of belonging. Some participants committed to being more intentional about attending church as a family, participating in ministries, and encouraging their children to engage in youth programs.

Mutual Encouragement and Spiritual Growth

Another key takeaway was the role of fellowship in strengthening faith. Participants recognized that engaging with other believers helps them stay accountable in their spiritual journey. Many shared how attending church regularly, hearing testimonies, and engaging in discussions has deepened their faith and provided guidance during difficult times. One participant mentioned that being part of a prayer group had been life-changing, as it created a space where to share struggles and receive spiritual and emotional support. This reinforced the idea that church involvement is not just about personal growth but about contributing to a thriving, supportive faith community.

Personal Reflections

As the facilitator, I found this session particularly impactful because it highlighted the deeper purpose of church involvement beyond just attending services. I realized that many participants had not previously thought about church in terms of building relationships and strengthening communal faith. The discussion emphasized that faith flourishes in connection with others, and the church provides a unique space for that to happen. One of my biggest takeaways was the importance of consistency. Just as relationships outside the church require time and effort to grow, so do the connections within the faith community. I also recognized the need to encourage parents to model

active engagement, so their children see church not as an obligation but as a place of belonging, encouragement, and growth.

Week 2 of the Family Pledge Initiative reinforced the value of building social capital through church involvement. Participants learned that consistent engagement in church fosters relationships that provide support, encouragement, and spiritual growth. Through Hebrews 10:24-25, we were reminded that faith is strengthened in fellowship, and by being active members of the church community, we contribute not only to our own growth but to the well-being of others. Moving forward, participants committed to deepening their church involvement, ensuring that both they and their children experience the full benefits of a faith-filled community.

Reflections on Week 3: Family Engagement and Accountability

Week 3 of the Family Pledge Initiative focused on Family Engagement and Accountability, with Joshua 24:15 (NIV) as our guiding scripture: “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” The objective of this session was to emphasize the importance of family commitment to faith and to highlight parental accountability in setting a spiritual standard for youth development. Through discussions and reflections, we explored how families can work together to create a strong spiritual foundation and ensure that faith remains a central part of their daily lives.

Key Takeaways from Week 3

Faith Begins at Home

One of the most impactful lessons from this session was the understanding that faith development starts within the home. Many parents acknowledged that while they desire their children to be engaged in their spiritual journey, they must first lead by example. We discussed how Joshua's declaration in 24:15 is not just a personal commitment but a call for entire families to actively serve and honor God together. Participants shared that faith-based activities, such as family prayer, Bible study, and worship, can reinforce spiritual values in children. One parent reflected on how their child's enthusiasm for church grew once they started reading Bible stories together at home. This conversation encouraged families to be more intentional about creating a faith-centered environment beyond Sunday services.

Parental Accountability in Spiritual Leadership

A major theme in our discussion was the role of parents and guardians in setting the standard for faith and accountability. Many participants realized that children observe and model their parents' behaviors, meaning that consistency in faith practices is essential. If parents prioritize prayer, worship, and church involvement, their children are more likely to do the same. Some parents admitted to struggling with consistency, due to busy schedules or uncertainty about how to engage their children in faith. As a group, we

brainstormed practical ways to stay accountable, such as setting aside dedicated time for family devotions, involving children in church activities, and ensuring faith-based conversations happen regularly. The importance of parents being transparent about their own faith journeys—both struggles and victories—was also highlighted to build trust and openness within families.

Family Engagement Strengthens Spiritual Growth

Another key takeaway was the understanding that faith is strengthened when the entire family is engaged together. We discussed how individual spiritual growth is important, but collective family engagement fosters a deeper commitment to living out faith. Participants noted that when children see their parents and siblings actively involved in church, they feel a greater sense of belonging and responsibility in their spiritual journey. One parent shared how implementing a "family faith night" helped their household become more connected spiritually. Another participant emphasized the importance of attending church as a family, reinforcing that worship is not just a personal duty but a shared experience that unites generations in faith.

Personal Reflections

As the facilitator, this session reinforced my belief that faith must be cultivated within the home for it to take root in a child's heart. I realized that while parents desire to guide their children spiritually, they sometimes feel overwhelmed by the responsibility. This discussion reminded me of the importance of providing families with practical tools and encouragement to make faith a natural and consistent part of their daily lives. One of

my biggest takeaways was the power of accountability. Just as parents set expectations in other areas of life—such as education and behavior—they must also be intentional about setting spiritual expectations. I also saw how powerful it was for participants to share their experiences and learn from one another, strengthening the sense of community and support within our group

Week 3 of the Family Pledge Initiative highlighted the importance of family engagement and parental accountability in faith development. Through Joshua 24:15, we were reminded that serving the Lord is a family commitment, not just an individual choice. Participants recognized that faith begins at home, that parents play a crucial role in modeling spiritual values, and that collective family engagement strengthens a child's commitment to their faith. Moving forward, families committed to being more intentional in their spiritual leadership, ensuring that their homes reflect the values and commitment expressed in scripture.

Reflections on Week 4: Church as a Safe Space for Youth

Week 4 of the Family Pledge Initiative focused on Church as a Safe Space for Youth, with Psalms 46:1 (KJV) as our guiding scripture: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The objective of this session was to help participants understand how the church serves as a refuge and a supportive community for youth, fostering emotional, spiritual, and social safety. Through discussion, we explored ways to enhance this safe space for families and the broader community.

Key Takeaways from Week 4

The Church as a Refuge for Youth

One of the most important insights from this session was recognizing that the church is more than just a place of worship—it is a refuge where youth can find guidance, support, and a sense of belonging. Participants reflected on how, in a world filled with uncertainty and negative influences, the church provides stability and reassurance. Psalms 46:1 reminded us that just as God is a refuge, the church should be a place where young people feel protected and encouraged. Some parents shared personal stories of how church involvement helped them or their children navigate difficult situations, such as peer pressure, bullying, or family struggles. Others noted that youth who feel safe and valued in church are more likely to stay engaged in their faith. This led to a discussion on how churches can be more intentional in creating a welcoming and nurturing environment for young people.

Fostering Emotional, Spiritual, and Social Safety

Participants also discussed the different ways the church provides safety—emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Emotionally, the church offers a supportive network where youth can express their concerns, receive guidance, and find mentors who genuinely care about their well-being. Spiritually, it is a place where they can grow in their faith, ask questions, and develop a strong foundation in biblical teachings. Socially, the church helps youth build positive friendships and develop a sense of community. One key takeaway was that for youth to see the church as a safe space, they must feel heard

and included. Parents and church leaders must be intentional about creating programs and discussions that address real-life issues young people face. Some participants suggested more youth-led activities, mentorship programs, and open forums where youth can share their thoughts and concerns.

Enhancing the Church as a Safe Space

The session concluded with a discussion on practical ways to strengthen the church's role as a refuge for youth. Participants recognized that while churches already provide support, there is always room for improvement. Ideas included:

- Creating stronger mentorship opportunities by connecting youth with trusted adults in the congregation.
- Encouraging youth participation in ministry roles so they feel a sense of ownership in the church.
- Organizing youth-focused events that blend faith-based learning with social engagement.
- Providing a safe and judgment-free environment where youth can talk about personal struggles.

Parents also committed to being more involved in church youth activities and ensuring their children feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and experiences in a faith-based setting.

Personal Reflections

As the facilitator, this session reinforced my understanding of how vital the church community is in shaping young people's lives. I realized that while youth may face many external challenges, a supportive church can serve as a strong foundation that helps them navigate these difficulties with faith and confidence. One of my biggest takeaways was the importance of active listening. When youth feel heard and valued, they are more likely to stay engaged in church and grow spiritually. I also saw the impact of parents recognizing their role in reinforcing the church's efforts by fostering open communication and encouraging their children to view the church as a second home.

Week 4 of the Family Pledge Initiative highlighted the significance of the church as a safe space for youth. Through Psalms 46:1, we were reminded that just as God is our refuge, the church should be a place of emotional, spiritual, and social safety for young people. Participants acknowledged the importance of fostering a welcoming and supportive environment and committed to enhancing youth engagement within the church. Moving forward, we aim to create stronger connections, mentorship opportunities, and inclusive spaces where youth feel truly supported in their faith journey.

Reflections on Week 5: Youth Engagement and Leadership Opportunities

Week 5 of the Family Pledge Initiative focused on Youth Engagement and Leadership Opportunities, with 1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV) as our guiding scripture: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity." The objective of this session was to explore the importance of involving youth in meaningful church roles, understand the

biblical foundation for youth leadership, and identify actionable steps to empower young people as role models and leaders. Through discussion and reflection, participants gained a deeper appreciation for the potential of youth in the church and recognized the importance of nurturing their leadership abilities.

Key Takeaways from Week 5

The Biblical Foundation for Youth Leadership

A central theme in our discussion was how scripture affirms the role of young people in leadership. 1 Timothy 4:12 reminds us that youth should not be underestimated but encouraged to be examples of faith. We reflected on biblical figures like David, Samuel, and even Jesus as a young boy—each demonstrating that age does not limit one's ability to lead and make an impact. Several participants acknowledged that, at times, they had viewed leadership as something reserved for adults, not fully recognizing how capable and influential young people can be. This shift in perspective helped parents see the importance of encouraging their children to take on active roles in the church rather than just being attendees.

The Importance of Meaningful Engagement

A key takeaway from this session was that youth must be actively engaged in the church to develop leadership skills and a sense of belonging. Many participants realized that simply bringing children to church is not enough; youth need opportunities to

participate in ways that make them feel valued and empowered. We discussed the benefits of youth involvement, including:

- Strengthening their faith by applying biblical principles in real-world situations.
- Developing leadership and responsibility through service.
- Building confidence and a sense of purpose within the church community.
- Creating intergenerational relationships that foster mentorship and growth.

Parents shared examples of how their children showed leadership qualities at home or school, reinforcing the idea that these same skills could be nurtured within the church setting.

Actionable Steps to Empower Youth Leaders

The session concluded with a brainstorming session on how to create more leadership opportunities for youth in the church. Participants identified several practical steps, including:

- Encouraging youth to participate in ministries such as ushering, worship teams, media production, and outreach programs.
- Establishing a youth leadership team where young people can help plan events and activities.
- Pairing youth with adult mentors to guide them in their faith and leadership development.
- Giving youth opportunities to lead prayers, scripture readings, or discussions during services.

One parent shared that their child had recently expressed interest in serving in the church's media ministry, which they had not previously considered. This conversation encouraged parents to pay closer attention to their children's interests and gifts, ensuring they have opportunities to serve in ways that align with their strengths.

As the facilitator, I found this session particularly inspiring because it challenged us to think beyond traditional roles and truly consider how youth can be active contributors to the church community. I realized that while many churches desire youth involvement, intentional effort is needed to create spaces where young people feel encouraged and equipped to lead. One of my biggest takeaways was that youth leadership is not just about preparing for the future—it's about empowering young people now. When given opportunities, youth can positively influence their peers, contribute to the church's mission, and develop into strong, faith-driven leaders.

Week 5 of the Family Pledge Initiative reinforced the importance of engaging youth in leadership roles within the church. Through 1 Timothy 4:12, we were reminded that young people can set an example in faith, speech, and conduct. Participants gained a new appreciation for the value of youth leadership and committed to creating meaningful opportunities for their children to serve. Moving forward, we aim to foster a church culture where youth feel empowered, supported, and encouraged to take on leadership roles that strengthen both their faith and the community.

Reflections on Week 6: The Long-Term Benefits of Church Involvement

In the final week of the Family Pledge Initiative, we explored The Long-Term Benefits of Church Involvement, guided by Psalm 92:12-14 (NIV): "The righteous will

flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green." The objective was to help participants understand the lasting spiritual, social, and personal benefits of consistent church involvement and identify ways to cultivate a lifelong commitment to faith within their families and community.

Key Takeaways from Week 6

The Enduring Spiritual Benefits of Church Involvement

A major takeaway from this session was recognizing how lifelong church involvement strengthens faith over time. We reflected on how being "planted in the house of the Lord" provides spiritual nourishment, guidance, and stability throughout different life stages. Participants shared personal testimonies of how church teachings and community support had helped them navigate challenges and grow spiritually. One participant noted that attending church consistently had helped their family build a strong faith foundation, ensuring that even during difficult times, they remained anchored in their beliefs. Others realized that their current involvement sets an example for their children, demonstrating that faith is not just for a season but a lifelong journey.

Social and Personal Growth Through Church Community

Beyond spiritual growth, we discussed the long-term social and personal benefits of church involvement. Many parents recognized that being part of a church community

provides a sense of belonging, strong friendships, and a support system that lasts for years. Participants acknowledged that their children benefit from positive role models, mentorship, and a safe environment that nurtures their character and values. A key realization was that church involvement extends beyond Sunday services—it shapes moral development, strengthens family bonds, and fosters a sense of purpose. Parents saw how staying connected to a faith community can provide wisdom, accountability, and encouragement throughout life's journey.

Fostering a Commitment to Lifelong Faithfulness

To conclude the session, we discussed ways to encourage a lifelong commitment to church involvement. Participants committed to:

- Modeling consistency in church attendance and active participation.
- Encouraging their children to build meaningful relationships within the church.
- Finding ways to serve together as a family to deepen their connection to the faith community.
- Emphasizing that church is not just an obligation but a source of joy, growth, and fulfillment.

As the facilitator, I was deeply moved by the reflections shared in this session. I realized that church involvement is not just about personal faith but about creating a legacy of faith for future generations. I saw a renewed commitment among participants to remain active in their church community and to ensure their children grow up valuing their faith.

Week 6 reinforced the importance of lifelong church involvement and the lasting impact it has on spiritual, social, and personal well-being. Psalm 92:12-14 reminded us

that those who stay rooted in God's house will continue to flourish. Participants left with a renewed dedication to fostering a strong faith foundation in their families, ensuring that their commitment to church remains a lifelong priority.

Conclusion

Overview of the Project's Success

The Family Pledge Initiative was a meaningful and impactful experience, successfully engaging parents in understanding the importance of faith in youth development. The project began with 10 participants but concluded with eight due to scheduling conflicts and personal issues. Despite this, the initiative remained strong, with participants showing consistent commitment to the discussions and activities. Over the six weeks, parents deepened their understanding of faith's role in their children's lives, engaged in thoughtful conversations, and ultimately pledged to prioritize church involvement for their families. Each session built upon the previous one, showing clear progression in participants' engagement and application of what they learned.

Data Showing Progression

Throughout the initiative, participants demonstrated increasing engagement, both in discussions and in their personal commitments. The pre- and post-surveys showed a positive shift in parental attitudes toward church involvement. At the start, four parents admitted that they struggled with consistency in bringing their children to church or were unsure how to encourage their children to engage spiritually. However, by the end of the

project, all eight remaining participants verbally affirmed their commitment to making church attendance and spiritual growth a family priority. Using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree allowed me to assess pre- and post-project effectiveness. An analysis of the pre- and post-survey results indicate positive progression. For example, when asked to rate the statement, "I actively guide my child's spiritual growth, the pre-project average was 2.9 out of 5 and the post-project average was 4.3 out of five. When asked to rate the statement, "My child is excited about going to church," the pre-project average was 3.1 out of 5 and the post-project average was 4.6 out of 5.

- Week 1: Parents identified personal barriers to faith-based parenting and explored ways to be more intentional in their children's spiritual development.
- Week 2: Participants acknowledged the value of community and church-based relationships in their children's growth.
- Week 3: Parents reflected on their role as faith leaders within the home and discussed ways to set a stronger example.
- Week 4: The group expressed a desire to make the church a more welcoming and safe space for youth, brainstorming ideas to strengthen youth support systems.
- Week 5: Parents recognized that youth are capable of leadership and began identifying ways to encourage their children to take active roles in church.
- Week 6: Participants shared long-term commitments, with several parents planning to get more involved in church activities alongside their children.

By the final session, every participant had pledged to consistently bring their children to church and encourage their involvement in ministries and youth programs. One participant stated, "The pledge made me pause and really think about my role in my child's faith." Another participated noted, "Before this, we weren't doing much at home

spiritually. Now we pray together almost every night." Some participants planned to volunteer in church leadership roles themselves, further solidifying their dedication.

What I Would Do Differently

While the project was successful, I recognize that certain adjustments could make it even more effective. One key change I would make is shortening the program from six weeks to three sessions, with each session lasting two hours. This revised format would allow for deeper discussions while accommodating the busy schedules of parents. In this model, each session would cover two lessons, allowing participants to engage with the material in a meaningful way without requiring a long-term weekly commitment. Additionally, I would incorporate more interactive activities to keep participants engaged and provide real-life application exercises between sessions. Encouraging parents to involve their children in parts of the discussion or setting up follow-up accountability check-ins could further strengthen the impact of the initiative.

What I Learned

One of the biggest lessons I learned from this project is the power of intentionality in faith development. Many parents want their children to be spiritually grounded but often struggle with consistency or knowing where to start. However, when given the right tools, encouragement, and a supportive community, they are more willing and able to make faith a priority in their households. I also learned that church involvement is not just about attendance—it's about engagement. Families who feel connected to the church and see its value in their daily lives are more likely to remain committed. Helping parents

recognize their role in fostering this connection is crucial for long-term spiritual growth in their children.

The Family Pledge Initiative was a success, equipping parents with the knowledge and motivation to be more intentional in their children's spiritual journey. Despite a couple of participants dropping out, the remaining eight showed growth in their understanding of faith's role in youth development and made lasting commitments to church involvement. By adjusting the structure of future sessions and emphasizing deeper engagement, this initiative can continue to make a lasting impact on families and the church community. The project reinforced the importance of faith-centered parenting, and I am grateful for the opportunity to witness its influence firsthand.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: "Faithful Stewardship: Examining the Effects of a Family Pledge Initiative that Empowers Parental Accountability and Youth Engagement at Legacy Pointe Church, in Cincinnati, Ohio."

Principal Investigator: Terrance w. Hillman Jr.
United Theological Seminary

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Terrance Hillman. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of a six-week Family Pledge Initiative at Legacy Pointe Church, which aims to empower parental accountability and youth engagement.

Purpose of the Study:
The study seeks to understand how participating in the Family Pledge Initiative influences the prioritization of children's attendance and engagement in church activities. Your participation will help us evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative and improve future church programs.

Study Procedures:
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:
1. Complete a pre-survey at the beginning of the initiative.
2. Participate in group discussions throughout the six-week initiative.
3. Fill out a post-survey at the end of the initiative.
4. Optionally, take part in an individual interview to discuss your experiences.
5. Commit to a Family Pledge Card, detailing your family's commitment to church attendance and
engagement. The total time commitment for this study is approximately 6 hours over 6 weeks.

Potential Risks:
The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. You may experience mild discomfort
discussing personal or family-related topics during surveys or interviews. If any question makes you
uncomfortable, you may choose not to answer it.

Potential Benefits:
Participation in this initiative will help increase family attendance and and contribute to a better
understanding of how to support family involvement in church activities at Legacy Pointe Church.

Confidentiality:
All information collected in this study will be kept confidential. Your name and any identifying information will be replaced with a code, and only the research team will have access to the code key. Data will be stored securely, and any publications or presentations will not include identifiable information.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Legacy Pointe Church.

Contact Information:
If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact:
• Principal Investigator: Terrance W. Hillman Jr., (513) 801-1627
• Church Leadership/Independent Contact: Dr. Paul Booth, (513) 225-2071

Consent:
By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood this information, you voluntarily agree
to participate, and you have received a copy of this consent form.
Participant's Name (Printed): _____
Participant's Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: Terrance W. Hillman Jr.

APPENDIX B

PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

Pre-Project Survey

1. Church Engagement
How frequently does your family attend church services together?
(Options: Weekly, Bi-weekly, Monthly, Occasionally, Rarely/Never)

2. Youth Involvement
How involved are your children in church activities or youth programs?
(Options: Very involved, Moderately involved, Occasionally involved, Not involved)

3. Parental Accountability
How often do you discuss your faith and spiritual beliefs with your children at home? (Options: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely, Never)

4. Perception of Faith's Importance
How important is faith in guiding your family's decisions and lifestyle?
(Options: Extremely important, Very important, Somewhat important, Not important)

5. Role of Church in Family Life
How would you rate the church's role in supporting your family's spiritual growth? (Options: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Not sure)

6. Family Communication
How often does your family have open discussions about challenges, goals, and values?
(Options: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely, Never)

7. Commitment to a Family Pledge
How likely would your family be to commit to a Family Pledge that encourages regular church attendance and spiritual discussions at home?(Options: Very likely, Likely, Neutral, Unlikely, Very unlikely)

8. Current Family Challenges
What are the biggest challenges your family faces in staying engaged with church activities?
(Options: Time constraints, Lack of interest, Conflicting priorities, Transportation issues, Other)
*If other, please explain why

9. Perception of Youth Engagement
How do you perceive your child's interest in participating in church-related activities? (Options: Very interested, Somewhat interested, Neutral, Not interested, Not sure)

10 . Expectations from the Church
What kind of support or resources would help your family be more engaged with the church?
(Open-ended question)

APPENDIX C

POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Post-Project Survey

1. Church Engagement
How frequently does your family attend church services together?
(Options: Weekly, Bi-weekly, Monthly, Occasionally, Rarely/Never)

2. Youth Involvement
How involved are your children in church activities or youth programs?
(Options: Very involved, Moderately involved, Occasionally involved, Not involved)

3. Parental Accountability
How often do you discuss your faith and spiritual beliefs with your children at home? (Options: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely, Never)

4. Perception of Faith's Importance
How important is faith in guiding your family's decisions and lifestyle?
(Options: Extremely important, Very important, Somewhat important, Not important)

5. Role of Church in Family Life
How would you rate the church's role in supporting your family's spiritual growth? (Options: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Not sure)

6. Family Communication
How often does your family have open discussions about challenges, goals, and values?
(Options: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely, Never)

7. Commitment to a Family Pledge
How likely would your family be to commit to a Family Pledge that encourages regular church attendance and spiritual discussions at home?(Options: Very likely, Likely, Neutral, Unlikely, Very unlikely)

8. Current Family Challenges
What are the biggest challenges your family faces in staying engaged with church activities?
(Options: Time constraints, Lack of interest, Conflicting priorities, Transportation issues, Other)
*If other, please explain why

9. Perception of Youth Engagement
How do you perceive your child's interest in participating in church-related activities? (Options: Very interested, Somewhat interested, Neutral, Not interested, Not sure)

10 . Expectations from the Church
What kind of support or resources would help your family be more engaged with the church?
(Open-ended question)

APPENDIX D

FAMILY PLEDGE INITIATIVE CARD

Family Pledge Initiative Card

Family Pledge of Commitment
We, the [ ] Family, pledge to honor God by:

1. Bringing Our Youth to Church Regularly
We commit to making church attendance a priority, ensuring our children are spiritually nurtured and engaged.

2. Modeling Faithful Stewardship
We will lead by example, showing our children how to live a life guided by faith, love, and service.

3. Encouraging Active Participation
We will support and encourage our youth to take part in church activities, ministries, and leadership opportunities. *

4. Building a Christ-Centered Home
We commit to fostering a home environment where faith, prayer, and God's Word are central.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)
"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it."

Signature of Commitment _____
By signing this pledge, we commit to prioritizing our faith as a family and ensuring the next generation is rooted in Christ
Family Members:
Parent/Guardian 1: _____
Parent/Guardian 2: _____
Child/Youth 1: _____
Child/Youth 2: _____
Other Family Member(s): _____

Date:_____

Next Steps:
Display this pledge in your home as a daily reminder of your commitment.
Participate actively in church activities and programs.
Pray together as a family for strength and guidance to fulfill this pledge.

A Family Pledge Initiative
An initiative to strengthen family ties, enhance youth development, and deepen the collective faith journey

APPENDIX E

FAMILY FAITH COMMITMENT PLAN

FAMILY FAITH COMMITMENT PLAN

Scripture Reference:
Joshua 24:15 (NIV) - “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

1. Identify Actions to Serve the Lord
Write down specific actions your family can take to serve the Lord:
Examples:
· Attend church services together every Sunday.
· Volunteer as a family in a church ministry or community outreach.
· Set aside time for weekly family devotions or Bible study.
· Pray together as a family daily.
· Encourage each family member to use their talents for God’s glory (e.g., music, teaching, hospitality).

2. List Obstacles and Solutions
Think about potential challenges your family might face in staying committed, and brainstorm ways to overcome them:
Examples:
· Obstacle: Busy schedules or conflicting commitments.
· Solution: Establish a non-negotiable time for faith activities (e.g., Sunday mornings, weeknight prayer).
· Obstacle: Lack of motivation or enthusiasm from family members.
· Solution: Rotate leadership roles so everyone feels involved; celebrate small successes together.
· Obstacle: Distractions from technology or other activities.
· Solution: Create a “tech-free zone” during family faith times.

3. Set Short-Term and Long-Term Faith Goals
Discuss and agree on achievable goals that reflect your family’s commitment to serving the Lord.
Short-Term Goals (1–3 months):
· Attend a church event or program as a family.
· Memorize one Bible verse together weekly.
· Identify one new way to serve in your church or community.
Long-Term Goals (6 months–1 year):
· Strengthen your family’s prayer routine.
· Commit to a regular volunteering opportunity as a family.
· Mentor or encourage another family in their faith journey.

Closing Note:
Post your Family Faith Commitment Plan in a visible place at home to remind everyone of your shared commitment. Revisit it regularly to celebrate progress and adjust as needed.

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